NOW AND THEN

Center for Appalachian Studies and Services/
Institute for Appalachian Affairs

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Louise Boyle

Somewhere outside Independence, Grayson County, Virginia, 1937

APPALACHIAN WOMEN

FROM THE EDITOR

Fred Waage

Sixty years ago, in his **The Land of Saddle-bags: A Study of the Mountain People of Appalachia** (Council of Women for Home Missions, 1924), James Watt Raine provided a portrait of the "Appalachian woman:"

> The "woman"--that is, the wife--tends the garden after it has been plowed and fitted. She raises onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, beans, tomatoes and sometimes squash. She raises a few chickens and geese and fattens a few hogs. She dices apples and corn and shucky beans. The latter she strings with a needle and hangs overhead. She cans tomatoes and blackberries, raises a patch of sorghum and makes molasses. She barters eggs and honey and feathers at the store for sugar, salt, coffee, needles, thread and various feminine trinkets. Some women in the remotest coves have never had a dollar in their own hands. Many of them have never been more than a few miles away from the place where they were born.

(And Raine quotes one woman: "I'd love to git to a place once whar I could see a big passel o' land that hadn't been stood up on edge like . . .")

Even in 1924, women of Appalachia lived diverse lives which transcended this stereotype in a multitude of ways. Yet the persistence of this perception has been as dramatic as the actual changes that have occurred in their lives since then. The conjunction of persisting skills and changing roles has given Appalachian women--more, perhaps, than men--a position at the flash point of transformation in our culture.

Increasingly it is the voices (and actions) of women themselves, not condescendingly analytical males, that are heard, bringing their own experience to others. As you listen to these voices and contemplate the pictures in this issue, you may come to a sense of the complexity of this experience, and how paradoxically it both affirms permanence and invites transformation.

This issue of *Now and Then* contains our regular features of news from the Center for Appalachian Studies and Service, and reviews of books, film and performances. But its main focus is work by and/or about Appalachian women, and this work has come so thick and fast to us that we have created a double (winter/spring) issue of it. It includes interviews by Pat Arnow with two notable women scholars of Appalachia; Grace Toney Edwards's study of the intriguing early 20th century poet Emma Bell Miles; fiction by Lou Crabtree, Amy Garza, Margery Plummer and Julia Nunnally Duncan; poetry by Lee Howard, George Ella Lyon, Anne Shelby and Rita Quillen; photos of women Then and Now (the Now photos are by Ronald Carr) including our stunning cover by Lousie Boyle.

Your comments and suggestions regarding this issue and *Now and Then* in general are welcomed, as well as your contributions for next year's issues, which at this writing will have the following three thematic emphases: Appalachian Music (Fall); Coming Home to Appalachia (Winter); Black Appalachians and Cherokees (Spring).

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Richard Blaustein

By the time you receive this special double issue of *Now and Then*, the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University will be almost a year old.

They say that a baby does most of its learning and growing during its first year; so much has happened during these past few months it almost seems as though years have passed. Ideas on paper have become concrete realities.

We have hired our first CASS faculty member, Charlotte T. Ross. Her background and interests are profiled later in this issue. We have also welcomed our first visiting foreign scholar, Janine Bensasson of the University of Paris X-Nanterre, who spent several weeks with us at the beginning of the year pursuing her study of the role of quilting in the lives of modern American women. A new group of CASS Fellows has begun to undertake projects which realize our goal of supporting artistic, scholarly and humanistic activites focusing on Appalachian themes and concerns.

We have also taken the first steps that will hopefully lead us to the establishment of a formal degree program in Appalachian Studies, a desire first expressed by members of our faculty and administration nearly 17 years ago.

Otherwise we have been sponsoring lectures, concerts, radio programs and providing services to regional public schools. We are looking forward to expanding these activities during East Tennessee State University's Diamond Jubilee in 1985-86.

Now and Then, of course, supports another prime objective of CASS, which is to foster the publication of scholarly and creative works comparable to those produced by other Appalachian centers. The response we have received to our first issue has been gratifying and encouraging, and I hope you enjoy what you find in this issue.

We have come a long way in a short time, but beginnings are never easy. All of us come into this world screaming and bloody, and it is only through love and nurture that we achieve our potential as human beings. The same is true of ideas and institutions, and in this sense the ETSU Center for Appalachian Studies and Services is still a baby. As I said at the end of my last column, the potential has always been here: the challenge is to make this potential a vivid reality. With your support, CASS can bring credit to East Tennessee State University while serving the people of this region. Help us grow.

FROM THE CENTER
Fellows of the Center, Spring 1985

Archives of Appalachia

Charles E. Lawson, "Series of Abstract Paintings"

Appalachian art is often narrowly perceived as landscapes, barn paintings and local flora and fauna. There are, however, fine young artists in the region like Charles Lawson, whose vision extends beyond the the limits of realism and genre painting. A talented painter as well as a promising short story writer and dramatist, Lawson is an alumnus of East Tennessee State University (B.S., 1981) whose artwork has received over 30 awards at regional exhibitions.

Lawson feels that there is a need to educate the region and expand the image of the Appalachian artist to include contemporary modes of expression such as non-objective art. His CASS Fellowship will enable him to undertake a series of abstract paintings to be exhibited in the B. Carroll Reece Museum during ETSU's 75th anniversary in 1986.

Gretchen Whisnant, "Religious Music of Appalachia"

In contrast to that of Charles Lawson, Gretchen Whisnant's art draws heavily upon traditional Appalachian themes and motifs, though in a subtle and innovative manner. A gifted calligrapher and

graphic artist, Whisnant has been exploring the possibilities of the hand-made book as a personal medium, producing her own richly textured papers and binding her own volumes.

An exhibition of her illustrations of traditional Appalachian ballad texts selected from the Burton-Manning Collection in ETSU's Archives of Appalachia received a great deal of enthusiastic attention. She is following this success with a new book project focusing on religious song texts to be collected from regional archives at Berea College and Appalachian State University, as well as ETSU. Her work will also be exhibited at the Reece Museum during ETSU's 75th anniversary celebration. A resident of Kingsport, Tenn., Whisnant teaches calligraphy in the ETSU art department.

Vicki Bourek Francoeur, "Kohler Arts Center Residency"

Ceramic art in the Southern Appalachian is rich and varied. Ceramists throughout the region produce historical styles based on generations of folk pottery traditions and avant-garde styles at the leading edge of the contemporary crafts movement. In the contemporary mode, techniques span the range of ceramic history from the most primitive modes of working and firing clay to the more conventional studio techniques of wheel-throwing and firing clay to reduction firing and also advanced industrial methods such as slip-casting.

To expand her own range of ceramic techniques and extend the dimensions of the ceramics courses she teaches in the ETSU department of art, Vicki Bourek Francoeur will be using her CASS Fellowship award to enable her to take part in an advanced slip-casting residency program at the Kohler Arts Center in Wisconsin.

A native of Dallas, Texas, Francoeur received the B.F.A. from the University of Texas-Austin and the M.F.A. in ceramics from Wichita State University. She has exhibited regionally and nationally and is active in professional ceramics and crafts organizations.

Sister Rosemary McLain, "Health Care Teaching Project For Appalachian People With Hypertension"

Every culture has its own particular set of beliefs and attitudes regarding the causes, symptoms and treatment of disease. Health care practitioners must take these beliefs into account in order to provide appropriate and effective therapeutic programs. As the result of a health assessment and promotion project which she supervised in southwest Virginia, Sister Rosemary McLain will be directing a health care teaching project which will entail the development of dietary, medical and relaxation programs in keeping with Appalachian cultural patterns. This will include identification of culturally-based barriers to compliance and the implementation of a series of teaching tools on diet, weight reduction, smoking reduction and relaxation therapy for Appalachian patients with limited reading and literary skills. This will be followed by an evaluation study exploring the ability of hyper-tensive patients to control their condition.

Currently chairperson of the Baccalaureate Degree Nursing program at East Tennessee State University, Sister McLain is a native of Pittsburgh, Pa. who received her doctorate from Indiana University in 1974 and has received many professional awards and honors in the areas of nursing and health care education.

Martha G. Whaley, "Registration of an Historical Medical Artifact Collection"

Organized in 1978, the Appalachian History of Medicine Society is dedicated to the preservation of health care traditions in the Southern Appalachian region. Among its goals and objectives are the furnishing of a History of Medicine Room in the Quillen-Dishner College of Medicine Library, sponsoring public programs dealing with regional medical history and the acquisition of documents and artifacts which illuminate that history. At present, the society and the medical library have acquired nearly 1,000 historic medical artifacts including instruments, equipment, office furniture, pharmaceutical supplies and assorted medical memorabilia from local practitioners.

Under the supervision of Martha G. Whaley, history of medicine librarian in the medical library, this substantial and significant collection will be prepared for research and exhibition purposes. A graduate of ETSU (B.S., 1973) who received the master's degree from Emory University in Library Science in 1974, Whaley has been one of the key figures in the Appalachian History of Medicine Society since its inception and is also an active member of other regional and historical organizations.

Judith A. Hammond and Robert G. Leger, "Appalachian Children's Resources Project"

Child abuse and neglect have recently become subjects of grave national concern, and unfortunately the Southern Appalachian region is not exempt from this disturbing social trend. A positive response to this situation has been the development of Court Appointed Special Advocate programs. These programs train community volunteers to provide abused and neglected children with continuous personalized representation. The volunteers serve as liaisons between courts, social welfare and health care agencies. Not only will the Appalachian Children's Resources Project be the first CASA program established in this area, but it has the additional distinction of being the first university-based program of its type in the United States.

Among the goals and objectives of the project are assessing the need for CASA volunteers in the upper East Tennessee area, orientation for local judges, development of training programs for volunteers, and particularly, the delivery of culturally sensitive services to Appalachian children and their families.

The director of the project is Judith A. Hammond, associate professor of sociology and anthropology at ETSU. Project administrator is Robert G. Leger, associate professor and chairman of the ETSU sociology/anthropology department. Leger is a native of Fitzgerald, Ga., who received the doctorate in sociology from the University of Iowa in 1974. Hammond is originally from Clearwater, Fla., and was awarded the doctorate in sociology by Florida State University in 1975.

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF APPALACHIA

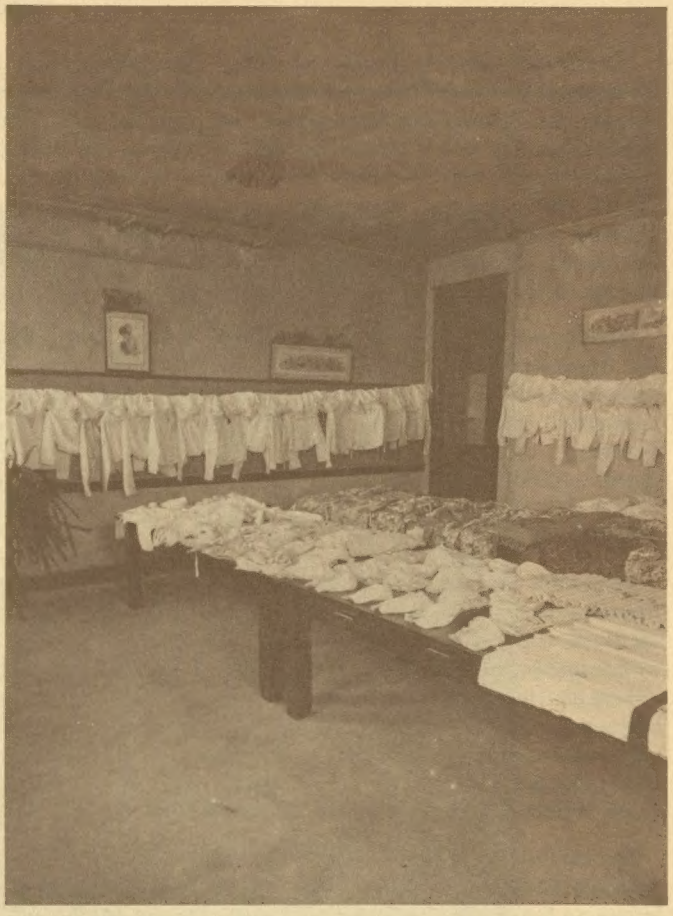
Services to Teachers

The Archives of Appalachia helps teachers bring Appalachian culture and history to life with visual, audio and written teaching aids. Many local teachers — from first grade to college level — are acquainted with slide/tape programs, for example. Eight programs are available, covering quilting, country music, logging, Embreeville, Johnson City, Pat Alderman, railroads and preservation and restoration of old homes. These programs, which require a dual projector system, are not available for loan but are shown by archives staff in the Tri-Cities area.

In 1982 a National Endowment for the Humanities grant provided funds to develop educational packets to accompany each program. Each packet includes a script of the program, questions for study, suggested activites and projects, bibliography and information about the archives and its collections.

The archives also has audio and video tapes available for loan. These recordings, which document regional politics, environmental issues, economic development, religion, traditional arts and crafts, storytelling, midwifery, farming, music, folklore, horse trading and other topics, can enrich many courses in the school curriculum. A guide to these recordings will be sent free to teachers upon request. The guide includes a brief description of each tape along with indexes to performers, song titles and subjects.

Archives of Appalachia



Archives of Appalachia

Included in the resources of the archives are 41 sets of documentary photo aids on a variety of topics in U.S. history and current events. Each set deals with a specific topic and includes from 10 to 68 reproductions, size 11" x 14", of photographs, cartoons, documents, paintings and front pages of newspapers. These sets may be borrowed for three weeks at a time.

"Tennessee's Mountain Heritage," a series of three half-hour radio programs, is designed to provide listeners with an entertaining and educational overview of various aspects of regional social history and folklore. The programs, funded by the Tennessee Commission for Humanities, were developed from archives collections and incorporate oral history interviews along with traditional music. An educational packet, including a guide on collecting family folklore and history by Dr. Richard Blaustein, accompanies the series which is available for loan on cassette tape.

Speakers from the archives are available to work with classes and to describe the resources; to demonstrate methods for the preservation and conservation of paper and photographs; and to provide hands-on experience in working with documentary materials.

Visits to the archives for instruction on resources will be arranged by the staff upon request.

FROM THE REECE MUSEUM

"The Great Forest: An Appalachian Story," an exhibition funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities through the Appalachian Consortium, will open at the Carroll Reece Museum with a lecture by Wilma Dykeman on Friday evening, May 10, 1985. The exhibition has been in preparation since the fall 1983 when the consortium's museum committee, with a planning grant from NEH, laid the groundwork to provide a mechanism for examining the cultural meanings of Appalachia through its forests.

Director of the project is Dr. Barry Buxton, executive director of the Appalachian Consortium. Project coordinator is the consortium's assistant director, Malinda Crutchfield. Members of the committee who planned and designed the exhibit are Helen Roseberry, director of Carroll Reece Museum, and Sam Gray, former exhibit coordinator at Appalachian State University. The exhibit was constructed at Appalachian State University by Jim Whittum, master carpenter, and Curtis Smalling, assistant.

The exhibit is in four sections, analyzing the prehistoric forest, the forest during the settlement period, industrial use of the forest and the forest today. It will be accompanied by a slide tape program written and produced by Gray. The exhibition will run from May 11 —June 23, 1985 and will be highlighted by the Dykeman lecture on opening night, followed by a reception. Accompanying the exhibit will be an interpretve guide which will include a forward by Buxton, an introduction by Gray and scholarly essays by Drs. Anne Rogers, Curtis Wood, Tyler Blethen, Ron Eller and Harley Jolley.

The exhibit is scheduled for showing at the Folk Arts Center in Asheville, N.C., July 6 - Sept. 9, 1985, with Ms. Dykeman's opening lecture on July 5, 1985; the Mountain Heritage Center at Cullowhee, N.C., Sept. 13, 1985 - Jan. 6, 1986, with Ms. Dykeman's opening lecture on Sept. 12, 1985; the Rural Life Museum at Mars Hill, N.C., Feb. 8, 1986 - April 29, 1986, with Ms. Dykeman's opening lecture on the evening of Feb. 7, 1986; and the Appalachian Culture Center at Boone, N.C., May 10 - June 15, 1986, with Ms. Dykeman's opening lecture on May 9, 1986.

As the opening site, the Carroll Reece Museum will serve as a model to other participating institutions. After its conclusion in June of 1986, the exhibition will be available for loan. The contact person is Malinda Crutchfield at the Appalachian Consortium office (704-262-2064).

This is the first of a series of projects which the museum committee will undertake during the coming months.

Addendum

The "Then" pictures in the centerfold of the Fall issue are from the Archives of Appalachia, and were reprinted courtesy of the Archives. The "Now" pictures on the same pages were by Dusty Carr.

CARROLL REECE MUSEUM
Exhibition Schedule - 1985

FABRIC ART: A SYNTHESIS OF DESIGNER AND CRAFTSMAN
Gallery A
May 11 - June 23

Woven works chosen through competition. Work is focused on fabrics designed for use as apparel. Organized by the Appalachian Center for Crafts, Smithville, Tenn.

THE GREAT FOREST: AN APPALACHIAN STORY
Gallery D
May 10 - June 23

An exhibition tracing the cultural meanings of the Appalachian Forest. Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities through the Appalachian Consortium.

BLUE RIDGE QUILTING EXHIBITION
All Galleries
June 29 - August 11

Regional handmade quilts in a variety of categories, including original design, appliqué, patchwork and others.

ROBERT MORROW - drawings
Gallery A
August 16 - September 29

Morrow is chairman of the art department at Kent State University. Though he has worked extensively in design, he will exhibit drawings he has produced during the last 20 years.

ROSLYN CAMBRIDGE - paintings
Gallery C
August 17 - September 25

A native of Trinidad and Tobago and a current resident of Washington D.C., Cambridge follows the path of abstract expressionism. Her works are characterized by mystical symbolism with philosophic and religious overtones.

DON DRUMM
Gallery D
August 17 - September 30

Drumm specializes in environmental art. He works in a variety of media, favoring materials contemporary to today's building techniques and trades. This exhibit will consist of all new cast aluminum works shown here for their exhibit debut.

BARBARA MORROW - illustrations
Gallery A
October 4 - November 20

Morrow is from the Kent, Ohio area. Her interest in illustrating children's books blossomed through a friend who wrote children's books.

Bringing the Pieces Together

Pat Arnow

Pat Arnow

When Janine Bensasson told her colleagues at the University of Paris (Paris 10) that she was going to write her American Studies Ph.D. thesis on quilts, she was misunderstood. "They thought I was going to study kilts, Scottish kilts," she said. When she clarified to them her field of study, they were incredulous. The tiny Frenchwoman mimics them, "Bedcovers? Can you really write a thesis on bedcovers?"

Her fellow English teachers weren't the only ones who didn't think much of the project. She could not convince her thesis advisor that she had chosen a sensible topic. In order to gain approval she transferred to a different Paris university that had a broader outlook on American studies.

"I didn't choose an easy path," says Bensasson, sitting at a Johnson City kitchen table with a view of icy streets and a snow-covered Buffalo Mountain. Sipping tea and munching on almond-flavored cookies that she has baked, the 35-year-old scholar explains what compelled her to spend the better part of this winter in Appalachia working on a complicated, expensive project that will afford her little recognition in her own country.

Speaking in a colloquial American style of English with a slight French accent, Bensasson says that the study of quilts has significance that most American studies scholars in France have not grasped. In quilts she has found a uniquely American art that is old enough to have an interesting history, but whose study is new enough that there is much to be discovered.

"Maybe I'm blessed, but among all the folk arts, I'd say quilts are one of the most significant in women's history. They were so important as functional objects for the home," she said, adding that she also is interested in current quilting trends. "I'm very proud that women have this art and it's alive and strong."

Though Bensasson has a sound rationale for studying quilting, her interest has a more emotional source. "I just fell in love with it. It was a visual feast for me." She describes how she discovered quilting when she was a graduate student in Connecticut in 1975. "I was driving down a little country road, and I saw a sign that said, 'Claire's Antiques' on this little house. I went in. There was this old

lady in her rocking chair with her pink cheeks and white hair. She was at this table piecing together a quilt.

"Her house was the antique store. It was a mess. It was the funkiest little house! It was tiny, her rocking chair was tiny, she was tiny, everything was small. She still had the room to put in a quilting frame. I asked her, 'what are you doing? Are you repairing clothes?' I mean, I didn't know. She told me, 'I'm making a quilt.' I said, 'What? What's that?" The Frenchwoman had never seen a patchwork quilt before.

Over the winter, Bensasson and Claire became friends. "She was just so adorable. She was very lonely, too. I thought, 'Where is her family? Why aren't they with this adorable old lady?' I went back to see her a lot. She'd open drawers for me. I bought things from her and I ordered a quilt from her. She used to call me her French granddaughter."

Bensasson became intrigued with the stories Claire told. "She was so close to New York, but she'd never been. She'd only been to Vermont. She was obviously a very different breed. I asked her, 'Next summer, could I just spend three days here and take pictures and record you? You have so many stories to tell and someone should record them." At the time, Bensasson did not have an extensive oral history project in mind. She intended to use the stories in her English classes in France.

When she left the United States with plans to return the following year to record Claire's memories, Bensasson tried to keep in contact by mail. "I kept writing and writing, but I never heard from her. Then this friend from Connecticut wrote and said that Claire had died. She had cancer. She was pretty old. That was a lesson to me. I had her there the whole winter. I could have recorded her."

Her interest in quilting grew. "I had so many questions. My dream didn't have to do with an academic study. My dream was to be able to travel around the U.S. and talk to quilters."

It wasn't going to be an easy dream to fulfill. There were no grants or scholarships available for the study of this folk art. To finance her research she sold an 18th century Kabalistic scroll that had come from her great grandfather. "I sold a family heirloom to research other people's family heirlooms," she says.

Once in this country, she still had no contacts outside New York. "I didn't want to stick just to the East Coast," she says. Through a New York colleague, she came in contact with Richard Blaustein at East Tennessee State University. He helped to bring her here through the State of Tennessee's Center for Excellence Program, as its first visiting foreign scholar.

The visiting scholar program is geared to bringing in people who are interested in using the resources the community has to offer, explains Blaustein, who is director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services and coordinator of the Center of Excellence at ETSU. Blaustein knew that East Tennessee would be as rich a resource as Bensasson could hope to find. "You could pave the road from here to Asheville in quilts that people here use every day," he says.

In return, "The community receives the value of the interested outsider. People take what they have for granted. When someone like Janine comes in with enthusiasm and a different viewpoint, it's emotionally and intellectually valuable," says Blaustein.

Becoming aware of objects usually taken for granted works both ways. When Bensasson went to a party in Johnson City, she thought her hostess had run out of glasses and was making do with jelly jars. Later she realized that what to her were everyday jelly jars were to her hostess charming imported drinking glasses. Bensasson had never before considered that they might have aesthetic appeal.

This personable woman and her companion, Jean Michel Janierre (who is studying the human potential movement for his American Studies Ph.D.), say they are impressed with the American hospitality and eagerness to share information and academic resources found in East Tennessee and everywhere else they have traveled in the U.S. She does not believe Europeans would be so generous.

Using Johnson City as a home base, Bensasson has traveled to Knoxville, Louisville, and Eastern Kentucky. She is finding that Appalachian quilters use more traditional patterns than quilters elsewhere. In this region, they are aware of trends in contemporary quilting. "They all subscribe to the *Quilter's Newsletter*," she says. Everywhere, even in the boondocks, people get this magazine. It's just that here they are interested in traditional quilting."

Bensasson is finding a wealth of material since she arrived here to do her research, far more than she expected. While she had told her disbelieving colleagues in France that she thought she'd be able to gather enough material for a credible thesis, she wasn't entirely sure that she'd picked a broad enough topic.

When she arrived in the United States, the reaction was quite different than it had been in France. "People wanted to know, 'What are you going to concentrate on? Is it going to be old quilts? New? Traditional? Black? Hawaiian? Contemporary? Appalachian? Which age group.' I thought I just wanted to talk generally about quilting, but it's so vast."

She decided she would concentrate on the past. "I thought that what was going on now was not very interesting, but the contemporary movement is so huge. Sixty thousand women in America are members of quilt guilds. That doesn't include all the women who quilt in America. You could double the figure easily. So I have to talk about that, too."

Though there might be a wealth of quilting to study, past and present, when she chose the subject, Bensasson was obliged to go to much more trouble than some of her fellow students. Many American Studies scholars can research and write their entire thesis without leaving France, she says. But there is little information on American quilting in French libraries. "I found two books, from 1925 and 1928, and that was it."

Even in the United States, the study of quiltmaking is relatively new. "The first time quilts went on the walls of museums, was in 1971 at the Whitney Museum. That was considered a milestone. That was the start of the quilt revival."

Pat Amow

At first, Bensasson says, the quilt revival only concentrated on the artistic perspective. "It was such a discovery, from an aesthetic point of view that these women in the 19th century, these illiterate women from the West were making these intricate geometrical things, just like all these artists of the 20th century.

Using quilts as tools for documenting women's lives is an even more recent phenomenon, says Bensasson. Studying it requires original research. "There are no centralized source of information. There's no one book that talks about 19th century women and their quilts in the economic, social and family context."

Bensasson is now focusing on aspects of quilting that are uniquely American such as the quilting bee. "Bringing the quilt to life with others--that phenonemon has always appealed to me as something especially American," she says.

The quilting bee was a festive event all over 19th century rural America, Bensasson has discovered. But the information about quilting bees is not easy to find. "It comes in scraps, from diaries, letters, references in books. Or, you have to talk to old women to find out." She also wants to know about contemporary quilting bees. "I want to talk to quilting groups. They will have stories to tell about what goes on."

The other aspect of quilting that Bensasson says is entirely American is patchwork. She traces its origins. "The technique of quilting can be traced back to the Crusaders who used quilted clothing. And then you had it in Medieval times. There was a lot of embroidery and applique in Europe, but that has nothing to do with log cabin or star pattern quilts."

The ancestor of American quilting came from England and Ireland in the form of intricate single-piece stitched works, explains Bensasson. "What's authentically American is the practice of taking tiny bits of fabric and making geometric patterns. The pioneers didn't have enough fabric to imitate what was done in England. They had so little but they were able to create something wonderful and unique."

In England, Ireland and France today, people are making patchwork quilts, but not anything based in their own traditions, says Bensasson. "It's from the American influence," she states.

Even with her well-reasoned political, social and artistic observations, Bensasson does not believe her work will be understood in France. It isn't just the notion of a thesis on bedcovers that baffles French academicians. "They love institutions and movements, so anything this limited, like needlework, they don't understand. They think it's ridiculous," she says. There is also the continuing problem that American Studies is afforded a low status in scholarly French circles. She says that until recently, it was not possible at French universities to major in American Studies, and those who spoke "American" English had less status than those who spoke "British" English.

In a talk at the Carroll Reese Museum this winter Bensasson said that the American Studies situation is improving in France. More courses are offered than ever before. But, she notes, "The French have a global, unified view of the United States." They are not aware of regional differences, and "are quick to judge the United States without taking into consideration the other pieces of the mosaic." Regional studies are almost non-existent, and "certainly nothing on Appalachia." When asked if visiting Appalachia has changed her perspective on the United States, she drawled, "I reckon it has."

She says she wants to change simplistic ideas that she has encountered in France. She'd like "to bring to France images of beauty, to show that this is as integral to the U.S. as technology and speed are." She also wants to bring to France "a tribute to American women."

She offers a tribute now. "I talked with a woman in Whitesburg, Ky. who was working on a quilting frame that was hanging from the ceiling. She said, 'Don't you want to try?' I said, 'Of course I do.' When I did, I realized it's hard work. I made four stitches and they were terrible."

She speaks with awe of a quilt she has seen, "One woman put 37,000 pieces of silk in her quilt and put 17 years of her life into making that quilt. It was a collage of her whole life."

Bensasson's excitement about American quilting might generate some appreciation in France when she returns, but her research has had an effect here, too. Meeting this woman who has traveled halfway around the world to marvel over our bedcovers, we tend to cast a more appreciative eye on our own customs and traditions. We find or rediscover our own everyday quilts that sometimes seem to us as common and unworthy of regard as French jelly glasses seem to Parisians.

Profile of a "Norrator"

Pat Arnow

Pat Arnow

When Charlotte Ross was a child, her great-grandfather called her Charley and dressed her in overalls. He had no sons and no grandsons, and "he didn't have any sons-in-law that he wanted to discuss with the world," Ross says. Since it was during World War II and Ross's father was away fighting, "It was pretty obvious that I was going to be the only great grandbaby he was going to live to see."

Ross and her great-grandfather were the youngest and oldest members of a four-generation household in the North Georgia mountains. The old man, who was born in 1860, told all his stories to the little girl. "He had this stuff stored up inside of him, all these things he wanted to teach to somebody," she says. "There I was. And there was nothing for either one of us to do all day long except talk to each other.

"I was really born in the 19th century. Though you might not have it added up that way," Ross smiles. What she means is that being her great-grandfather's constant companion for the first six years of her life made her part of another generation, one that had long since passed. When she first went to school, the young mountain girl was pressured into the present. By learning standard English, a much less colorful language than her great-grandfather's dialect, she crossed the bridge to the 20th century. But she never burned the bridge. She's still a mountain woman and a storyteller. She is also a scholar, established and respected in the academic world.

When she's sitting in her university office, leaning back in a swivel desk chair, it is not in the least obvious that Ross has any other persona than the scholarly one. With upswept hair and tailored clothing, the image she projects is that of a poised, articulate observer of her culture.

Her credentials bear out that impression. She's an anthropologist and folklorist recently awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. This year she became the first visiting scholar in the State of Tennessee's Center for Excellence program at East Tennessee State University. She has collected and collated more than 2,000 stories from Appalachian women. These oral histories have become the basis for her Ph.D. dissertation.

It is when she offers to give an example of the kind of story she most often hears that a different persona emerges. She leans forward, starts using her hands to help her talk, and her already melodious Southern accent becomes more rhythmic and slower. The grammar changes too. Ross is no disinterested observer of the culture. She collects oral histories because she loves hearing and telling good stories.

"This one is about Rebecca Latimer Felton. Aunt Becky. She was the very first Congresswoman of these United States of America. Now you might think that's what she'd be remembered for down in the North Georgia country, but that's not what people talk about when they remember Aunt Becky. What they say about Aunt Becky at home is that she is 'almost stingy.' She carried that good Scotch-Irish thriftyness to a nigh fault. Parsimonious is the word that comes to mind. Aunt Becky had never lacked for very much in her life so people around about Smith's Crossroads really couldn't understand why she was natured this way, but she squeezed a nickel so hard the buffalo would wince.

"Toward the end of her life she and Judge Felton were living back there in Smith Crossroads in the North Georgia mountains. My husband's people were some of the Smiths that lived there. One hot summer day, Judge Felton, he lay dying, and of course all the neighbors came. They were all there to help. But there wasn't much anyone could do. He was an old man, old and sick.

"My husband's uncle Earl was there and he had a brand new red wooden wagon. He was so proud of that thing. He had it out in the front yard that day. Aunt Becky, she looked out of the window and saw Earl with his wagon. She said, 'Earl, you come over here. Harry, you too.' Harry was Earl's bigger brother. He had a little sense and some muscles. She said, 'I need something, and you boys can get it for me. I want you to take that little wagon you got there, Earl, and go down to the store by the crossroads and get me some ice. Judge Felton has a high fever and we want to pack him in ice to keep him comfortable tonight.' She unsnapped her coin purse and reached in and took out a nickel, and handed it, not to Earl, but to Harry. And Harry's about nine. And he said, without even thinking, he said, 'Aunt Becky, a nickel's worth of ice won't last the night.' She snapped her coin purse shut and pursued her lips and said, 'Neither will the judge'."

Until she was an adult, Ross did not realize that she or anyone in her family was a storyteller, but they all were. It's just that no one called it storytelling. "We're big talkers in my family. Not all

Appalachians are taciturn. Most have a facile tongue. And it can be quite sharp, that tongue," she adds.

When she was a child and people would start telling stories, Ross's mother would call it "that big way of talking." An old mountaineer's term expresses how the storytellers performed their magic. They called it "Norrating," which is a combination of narrating and orating.

As rich as the mountain traditions are, they aren't always easy to keep alive. As a child Ross struggled with enormous pressure to abandon her dialect and culture. After being raised by her great-grandfather for the first six years of her life, Ross and her parents moved to a town just outside of Atlanta where she started school. "When I hit the first grade, I had just a terrible experience, all the prejudice you could feel as an Appalachian child in a big-city school. It was a scarring experience. I had a lot of trouble with the teacher. The teacher assumed because of the way I spoke, that I was not smart." The children in the school, taking their cue from the teacher's attitude, made fun of their schoolmate for her language and her plain clothing. Even though she knew how to read, she did not do well in the school. "I wasn't comfortable opening my mouth in school because the teacher had so much to say about the way I spoke."

The pressures didn't come only from the urban school. "When I went back home, we had teachers from the outside who would try to change our speech." The gifted children in her rural school encountered even more pressure than the average students to conform to what the teachers considered an upwardly mobile track, says Ross.

Pursuing a college education was also difficult for Ross. "I was a teenage mother. I was an Appalachian woman. But wherever we were living and working I tried to take at least one course every semester, somtimes more." Remembering the times when she juggled children and classes, she enthuses about her role teaching anthropology in the new university program that offers courses via local television.

It took Ross a number of years and considerable determination to earn baccalaureate and advanced degrees in English. It was a feat she accomplished without ever being a full-time student, and while she was raising her children.

When Ross became an English teacher, she had an opportunity to approach the issue of her student's dialect in quite a different way than her own teachers had. She encouraged the Appalachian and black students in her classes to maintain their dialect but she also wanted them to learn to speak and write standard English as well. "I think you can have both," she says.

Still, she had reservations about teaching English. "Literature, though I love it, is an elitist discipline," she says. She gave it up in favor of studying and teaching folkore and anthropology, fields that were more appropriate to her commitment to Appalachia.

Resuming her studies, she earned a master's degree in folklore from the University of North Carolina. It seemed, though, that no amount of determination was going to enable her to earn a Ph.D., in folklore. The only two graduate schools with such a speciality were the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Indiana. Because of finances and family responsibilities, Ross did not expect that she would ever be able to attend either school.

She did not count on receiving a full scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, but when it came through, she was ready. "When I was 40, my youngest child went off to college. He left one day and I left the next day for Philadelphia."

It was the first time in her life she could study without worrying about other obligations. "It's the most unlikely thing for me, a middle-aged mountain woman, to go to an Ivy League School. It was the most wonderful experience of my life. I think I got more out of it than a lot of other people did. I took four courses a semester for credit and I sat in on another six. I didn't have one job, much less two, as I had for so many years. It was luxurious. For some people, luxury is a bubble bath. For me it was school—to have a scholarship and not to have to work."

Ross's dissertation had to do with the 2,000 stories she had collected from Appalachian women. She believes that she has found a kind of story that is common but that no other oral historian has tapped. She describes how she made her discovery. "For two or three years, I'd go out with my tape recorder. I was looking for everything. I took recipes, I took proverbs, I took anything. I wasn't particularly looking for stories, but everybody specializes in something, so I began to ask more and more for stories."

She found that Southern Appalachian women knew all kinds of stories—stories for children, legends, ghost stories and family histories—but the kind she heard most often, and that she believes is most common, is what she calls the "memory story." She explains, "These are humorous local character sketches. It's a way of keeping a person alive when there's no written history. It's a beautiful legacy. If you didn't have a story about that person, all you would have is the name on a tombstone."

She gives a pointer on collecting stories, "If you go out with a tape recorder and ask for stories, nobody will give you anything at all. They'll say, 'I don't know any.' Because, to them, storytelling means the kind of thing you tell the children. But if you tell a little story from your family, then they'll give you ten from theirs."

Certain unwritten rules guide the telling of "memory stories." They have to be true. Each story illustrates just one facet of a personality, the person's most prominent characteristic. It can show the person's tenderheartedness, or enterprise, or courage, but most of the stories are funny. "They're not exactly caricatures," says Ross, "but a lot of them are humorous," like the following:

"My husband's Aunt Charley Ruth is right civic-minded. She works in political campaigns and she drives the school bus and she plays the pianer at the Methodist church of a Sunday morning. She's a big, stout woman, and she gets mighty hot in the summer.

"They came through with the electric in 1949 and most all the country women began getting electric appliances. And Charley Ruth, she was enterprising.

"Well, by 1955 in Murray County, Georgia, all the country women had deep freezes. Charley Ruth, now, she was forever studying ways to use that deep freeze.

"Back then, all the women wore girdles to meeting on Sunday morning. And Charley Ruth, she had herself an idea. She wrapped up that girdle and through the week she stored it in the deep freeze. And Sunday morning just before she came out to the back porch to get in the car, she'd open up the deep freeze and get out the girdle, and she'd wiggle into that thing, and she'd go off to church looking so cool. People would be wondering how she managed to look so happy.

"Well, she had hay fever worse than anybody I ever knew, especially in August when the ragweed came out. She couldn't smell anything! It was pitiful. And she had two of the meanest little boys you ever saw. One of them grew up to be a Baptist preacher and the other one a banker. They got a catfish and left it out in the sun for three or four days to ripen and then they wrapped it up with their

Mama's girdle, and laid it out in the sun for another three days. Sunday morning they slipped the girdle back into the deep freeze just in time for it to get good and crisp before she came out the door ready to put it on. So Charley Ruth wiggles into that thing and is all set to go th church that day. She cranks the truck and rides to the church and goes on up to play the piano. Well, when she got there, everybody noticed, but no one had the nerve to tell her. But they tell me that half the cats in the North end of Murray County, Georgia attended Methodist services that morning.

Ross's family has lived away from the region but they were ready to return to the mountains. In the 1960s, before moving to Boone, N.C., both Ross and her husband Carl had good prospects for teaching positions in a college near Savannah, Ga. "We liked it. We liked the people. But it was real flat." That is why they were eager to work at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. "I don't know if there is anyone in your family who still talks about needing 'something to rest your eyes upon.' but mountain people are not really happy away from the mountains. And we wanted to raise our children in the mountains."

There was another reason Ross wanted to move to Boone. It was in the person of Cratis Williams, the pre-eminent Appalachian scholar from Appalachian State University. Williams was the author of a comprehensive, three-volume dissertation, completed in 1960, *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*. It was written at a time when Appalachian culture was a virtually untouched field. In the mid-1960s, Ross became familiar with Williams's work. "I fell in love with that dissertation," she says. "It meant so much to me that there was somebody else who cared desperately about Appalachian things."

When she first traveled to Boone, she was hoping to be able to work with this man whose work had been such an inspiration. She found Williams to be as impressive in person as his writing had been. Describing meeting Williams, she says "We walked in and he listened to us speak and he said, 'North Georgia, probably within a 30-mile radius of Rome.' It was exactly right. How many people have such an ear for dialect?"

Ross and Williams did work together and they became friends as well. Together they built the Appalachian collection at the library, and designed Appalachian studies program there.

The Appalachian studies field has grown considerably since Ross moved to Boone in the 1960s. The recent popularization of some of the folk arts and culture is all to the good, Ross feels. "Anything that confers dignity on what these people have always done—I'm for it. A museum show won't mean that much to them, but at least they'll get better prices for their work after there's been one. Country is becoming big business. Rustic chairs would have been thrown away 15 years ago. I'm glad they're not being thrown away now, but you have to be rich and live in New York City to afford one now."

Though she would not claim to be rich or to live in New York, Ross does collect mountain crafts. "I became interested in quilting because it's a woman's medium. I think after I studied this great treasure of women's stories, I thought, what else do women do? I started looking at quilts, baskets and pottery."

She believes that until recently, mountain women worked on their craft individually, in isolation. There were no quilting bees in Appalachia, Ross asserts, because of the inaccessibility of the mountains. There was an exception, however. "I did see women quilt together when they went to a funeral. There was a custom when I was growing up, of whatever work was undone in the woman's house when she died, or a man's house for that matter, that the people would pitch in and do it. So you'd wear your old clothes when you would go to a burying. You'd take your nice clothes with you to slip on for the actual burying."

"I don't really remember Cora Gregory. But I will never in this world forget her funeral. I guess I was about four and a half then. I was playing out in the yard and I saw a fire, smoke going up in the late afternoon twilight. Maybe 20 minutes later, on the next mountain top, there was another fire. I said, 'Mama, mama, there's a fire on the mountain!'

"She came out and stood, and all the adults gathered. It was getting dark enough to see the fires now. Finally, there were eight fires against the night sky on the tops of the mountain ridges.

"Mama said, 'Cora Gregory's dead.' And she pitched into cooking. I said, 'How do you know it's her?' And Mama said, 'I just know.' Apparently a lot of other people did too, because the next morning we got up early, and after the cows were milked, we left home. We got up to the village and some of the women were standing by the side of the road, maybe with a bushel of potatoes this one was going to take or that one had made a cake. They were just waiting for us to stop and pick them up in our truck.

"My stepgranddaddy, my grandmother and I were in the cab of the truck, and I was sitting on my Mama's lap, and finally there were about five people in the cab of the truck. By then the back of the pickup was just full. First people were sitting, then as we picked up more, they had to stand to make room for them and all the stuff they were carrying. And there were people standing on the running boards.

"We went into Cohnetta Springs where she lived and some of the men were cleaning out the ditches. Others had weeded the garden patch. In the house, the women waxed the floors and washed the windows. Everything was swept down and dusted off. A big meal put on with the things that people had brought. Out on the porches that went around the house there were hooks up there where she suspended her quilting frames in the summer. They set up two quilting frames and they finished all of the tops that she had pieced. They sat down and quilted them.

"So that's the only time I ever saw a quilting. They finished everything that had been left undone. That was just a way of showing love and respect and affection. It gave a sense of closure. And then everbody ate, and then at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon they carried her to the family graveyard in a pine box. I remember they carried it shoulder high. The graveyard's always up on a hill. You have to climb. And they buried her, you know, facing east toward Judgment day."

Ross doesn't see her focus on women from a feminist perspective but as a way to uncover a strength and fortitude that has always existed in women of these mountains. "When the rest of the country came to feminism, they were just catching up with where we were already," she says.

"There have always been strong mountain women. I don't know anybody really stronger than the women in my family. I have one ancestress who was the young widow of an old revolutionary war soldier. She took up a land grant in North Georgia. She had these twin boys who were eight years old, and she had her pigs, her milk cow and a calf, an axe and a wagon. She walked into that country with that axe to settle. One of her boys was mauled by a bear as they were coming over the mountain."

Charlotte Ross tells her stories at festivals and to her classes. While she may be comfortable in both the 19th and 20th centuries, and in both a folk culture and an academic world, it is only with her help that the rest of us can look into the past, into the hills, into the lives of people whose lives were never recorded in history books.

REVIEWS

Generations: An American Family
by John Egerton
Robert J. Higgs

Someone described *Generations* to me as an Appalachian Roots. The more appropriate term in this case, however, would be "trunk" if one is limited to the organic metaphor in classifying oral history, which has now achieved a status in itself. The Ledford family, living and dead, make up the family tree described in this unusual book, but the "trunk" is Burnam (1876-1983) and Addie Ledford (1885-), truly two in one if man and woman were ever so united. Says the author, "The children and grandchildren were important, and so were the ancestors, but the living elders were essential. The story hinged on their lives. Only they could see three generations backward and three forward from their own—and it was that long view, that perspective, that made the Ledford Chronicle both an original tale and a universal one."

Without, I'm sure, intending to boast, Egerton himself has reviewed his own work in the phrases "original" and "universal." It is like other works of oral history but different, both in subject and treatment. In the generations that surround Burnam and Addie Ledford is "uncelebrated history." Here is a first-hand account of a century's intercourse between mountain and blue-grass culture, the conflict between industry and agriculture, including attitudes toward Negroes, the impact on lives of coal, timber, even dams, and new inventions such as the car, and the struggle for a living and education. Here in one family is "God's plenty."

In developing this rich and diverse chronicle of Harlan and Garrard counties Egerton has made use of several techniques: direct quotation from tapes or transcriptions, imaginative reconstruction relying faithfully upon family legend, and simple narrative of the search for graves of Ledford ancestors, time-worn trails, old houses and landmarks. Always, though, attention returns to Burnam and Addie, very real and symbolic at once.

By coincidence I was teaching *Absolom, Absolom!* in our Faulkner seminar when I read *Generations*, and I could not help but be struck by the contrast—though also a certain similarity in rotating perspective in an effort to get at the truth of history—between the Ledford patriarch, Aley, who at thirteen, saw his parents killed in an accident at Cumberland Gap in 1802, and Thomas Sutpen who early in the same century was turned away by a Negro butler from a plantation home in Western Virginia. Both young men had a "design" but entirely different attitudes toward slavery and status. What Sutpen was devoid of in Quentin Compson's view, love, allowed the Ledfords to endure and quietly prevail, to have a place to come to and a past to treasure.

"The River"
Universal Studios; Starring Sissy Spacek and Mel Gibson
Ron Giles

Two films, one recent and one 25-years old, provide a "now and then" perspective on the character of the Appalachian native — a character which, judging by the films, remains vitally intact. This Appalachian character becomes even more distinct as it contrasts with certain personalities that one now finds on and off the screen —personalities that take pride in being vulnerable, confessional and unshamed.

The older film, *Wild River* (starring Montgomery Clift and Lee Remick), focuses on the intractable disposition of an elderly woman named Ella Garth (Jo Van Fleet) who resists the TVA's attempt, under eminent domain, to confiscate her property, soon to be flooded by the backwater from a new dam. Ella Garth is the very embodiment of the Appalachian matriarch, the archetypal figure who takes her authority from the land on which she has shed her "heart's blood." Analyzing the strenth of the Appalachian mother figure ("The Power of One Woman," *Esquire*, January 1985), Phillip Moffitt remembers his grandmother who lived "a way of life that created women with tough, worn bodies, fixed, guarded faces, and eyes that had learned the danger in expecting too much from the world." This description applies as well to Ella Garth and to her cinematic descendant, Mae Garvey, the young mother in *The River*, a recent film starring Sissy Spacek and Mel Gibson.

The two movies share remarkably similar plots. In *The River*, Spacek and Gibson portray an Appalachian couple named Garvey who resist not only the rain-swollen river but also the land-hungry villain who wants to dam the river in order to protect his interests. The Garveys, like Ella Garth, show the same devotion to the land, the same fortitude that treats adversity with contempt. What exactly is the quality of this devotion to the soil itself? What is it that binds the Appalachian people to their land and makes farm family one? A scene in *The River* suggests one answer to these questions. The camera's eye, at ground level, focuses through a family cemetery on the Garveys, plowing in the distance. The viewer sees the "Garvey" name carved on the tombstones and realizes, in one brief but vivid instant, that the dust to which a Garvey returns is family dust. Allegiance to the fathers cannot be separated from allegiance to the fields.

The Appalachian character then, as we see it in these two films, squares with our experience, our understanding of our neighbors. It is not necessarily an anti-progressive character, resistant to change, but it is a collective personality which meets life on familiar terms and relishes the memories and experiences which its need for expression distills into the tales, the song and the folk wisdom of Appalachian culture. And this collective character understandably resists those forces -- naturally or man-made — which would, in altering the basis for its existence, threaten its continuation Therefore, in this case, it is easy to agree with the movie versions: what the Appalachian native has for component parts of his or her character is that valor, that faith, that love which, according to the Fugitive Poet Donald Davidson, have come "to flower among the hills to which we cleave."

"Sunny Side of Life" and *Living With Memories:*

A Look Inside The Carter Family Fold

Richard Blaustein

A fierce arctic storm was creeping down the spine of the Appalachian range, but the threat of foul weather was not about to deter the large, enthusiastic crowd gathered in the huge wooden music shed at the Carter Family Fold in Hiltons, Va., on the evening of Saturday, Jan. 19, 1985, to view the world premiere of Appalshop's latest film, "Sunny Side of Life." Six years in the making, "Sunny Side of Life" is an affectionate yet insightful cinematic portrait of the Carter Family, now and then, centering around Janette Carter and her successful personal crusade to revive oldtime music and dancing at the Carter homeplace in Poor Valley, which began ten years ago with the conversion of her father A.P. Carter's old country store into a community music center.

"Sunny Side of Life" draws its title from one of the original Carter Family's most popular songs. It could have just as easily been called "The Unbroken Circle" since its central theme is the continuity of a family tradition that is still as vital in its own way today as it was nearly 60 years ago when A.P., Sarah and Maybelle ventured down to Bristol, Va., in response to a newspaper advertisement, to make their first commercial country music recordings for Victor's Ralph Peer. "Sunny Side of Life" not only sheds light on the role of the Carters in the early history of country music through highly effective and creative use of historic photographs, film clips, video footage and interviews, but it also provides a clear sense of the powerful bonds of affection and loyalty which link the present generation of Carters and their friends and neighbors together as a very real sort of extended family through the expressive vehicles of music and dance.

The strength and reality of these emotional ties were clearly expressed in the crowd's response to "Sunny Side of Life." You could hear whoops of laughter when familiar figures and faces appeared on the screen, and occasionally the sound of weeping, too, when friends and family members caught glimpses of departed loved ones. In this respect, the premiere of "Sunny Side of Life" did represent the completion of a great circle which was truly unbroken: the validation and affirmation of the beliefs, values and attitudes of the Carters, their neighbors and kin, and also Appalshop as well, brought together through the medium of this remarkable film—which surpasses any documentary I have seen to date in articulating the emotional ties which lie at the heart of oldtime country music and the Appalachian experience.

Seeing "Sunny Side of Life" in this setting made me think about the personal qualities of charismatic leaders, and particularly how accurately this film has portrayed Janette Carter. Janette has told her own story in her own words in her autobiography, *Living With Memories*, which ought to be essential reading for anyone seeking to fathom the emotional depths which underlie "Sunny Side of Life." Significantly, *Living With Memories* is dedicated to Janette's family — her children, her brother and sister, her cousins and the rest of the Carter clan — and it is filled with her reminscences and poetry, all of which reveal her deep attachment to her people, her land and her religion:

My family, my Jesus, my memories and dreams
Are entwined in a house on the hill.
The mountains, the streams, green pines tall and lean
Surround me so calm and so still.
In my Appalachia, my neighbors are kind.
The love me if I'm right or wrong.
Though others walk tall, I feel very small.
I praise God each day with a song.
(from "My Appalachian Mountain Home," *Living With Memories*, p. 5)

Cecil Sharp remarked in *English Folksongs From The Southern Appalachians* that the southern mountaineers were a people to whom singing seemed to come as naturally as speaking. In *Living With Memories*, we find Janette easily and unaffectedly moving from prose to poetry and song; indeed, many of her narrative passages are suffused with a lyrical quality. Janette's personal qualities—stern yet loving, spiritual yet realistic, hard-working yet playful—are a direct legacy of her upbringing:

> They were proud, my people. They worked so hard--they shared their food, their loves, their lives. All the neighbors were intertwined. They helped one another in sickness--or in a season of plenty. Neighbors were close to one another. They all worked to survive! If our cow went dry, some neighbor had one with a new calf. They shared the milk, fruit,

gardens. When a neighbor died, the men dug a grave with a pick and shovel. As a child I thought the most horrible sound on earth was dirt clods hitting the casket after it had been lowered into the ground. I would cling to my daddy's hand and thank God I still had my parents! And tears would fall. My heart ached for those who had died and left children and family.
(*Living With Memories*, p. 15)

One of the great gifts of charismatic leaders is their ability to express the sentiments of the community which identifies with them, and it is clear that Janette has inherited this gift, which made the original Carter Family's songs of family and home so moving to their listeners and admirers. Janette's own family and home life was far from idyllic. She was deeply hurt when her parents A.P. and Sarah divorced, and she openly and honestly discusses the failure of her own two marriages and the role that her music has played in healing those wounds.

It took me a long time to realize I have a talent, that God had given me one! It never occurred to me while Mother, Daddy, and Maybelle lived, to devote my life to music. They were there while I was busy working at any work to survive and support my children. Paul in the Bible said, "Look to the future--look ahead and not back." What is past is gone like water under a bridge; it flows on somewhere else. So when my marriages failed, I turned to music. I love all music, but I like the kind my family sang best. They poured their hearts into their work. My music is like the love I give my children, my family, and my God. I give all of me!

The turning point came one year as late summer was turning into fall. I was sitting on the steps, looking out over the valley, feeling pressures of bills--my future looked dim. Inside of me lay a promise I had made to my daddy, "I will carry on your work."
(Living With Memories, p. 71)

As Janette freely admits, her family and neighbors thought she was a little crazy when she announced that she wanted to clear out the junk and tobacco stalks that were cluttering up A.P.'s old grocery store. But they pitched in and helped her anyway, and on Aug. 24, 1974, the store was open and ready for her first show. Janette was fulfilling her own sense of mission through turning the old Carter store into a community music center, but as her growing audiences quickly demonstrated, she was also providing the people in the region with something they needed and wanted: a wholesome, clean place where families could go to enjoy oldtime mountain music and dancing. She received her share of criticism; she was told that a woman had no business running a music hall, and some of the straitlaced church people in Poor Valley let her know that she was doing the devil's work by permitting and encouraging dancing. Janette, however, was following a pattern which had been set by her parents during her childhood days:

There were a few scattered square dances in the valley, but we couldn't go, as there might be drunks! Some stories of the Carter family have claimed my daddy drank, but he was the most sober man I ever knew. He hated whiskey; it never was in our home. We could dance at home, though--hoedown, buck dance, the Charleston, or hit the back step. I learned all this from the world's greatest dancer, my mother.
(*Living With Memories*, p. 47)

Scot Oliver

Janette and Joe Carter on stage at the Carter Family Fold during the premiere of Appalshop's film, "Sunny Side of Life."

Despite criticisms and financial worries, Janette endured and prevailed. At this point in her life she has achieved no small degree of success and fame, while bringing a great deal of happiness to all of us who share her love of oldtime mountain music and dancing. The night of the premiere of "Sunny Side of Life," I felt that I had just begun to understand that the Carter Family Fold was more than a fine Appalachian music hall; that it really was a concrete expression of a profound desire to preserve and perpetuate cherished beliefs, values and memories which give meaning to a particularly Appalachian vision of the good life — if you will, a bridge between now and then. Appalshop has clearly conveyed this attempt to fuse the best of now and then in "Sunny Side of Life," but the last word of the subject rightfully belongs to Janette Carter herself:

The Carter Fold is my way of trying to keep my mother and daddy's memories close to me. It's been hard, but I didn't expect it to be easy! I feel happy in my music. If I felt I was doing wrong, there would be no music--it surrounds me with love!
(*Living With Memories*, p. 83)

APPALACHIAN WOME

EN NOW AND THEN

Archives of Appalachia

Dusty Carr

Dusty Carr

Archives of Appalachia

Emma Bell Miles, Appalachian Poet

Grace Toney Edwards

In the early 1900s an artist emerged from Walden's Ridge in the Tennessee Cumberlands to share a handful of her creations with the world; but her appearances were brief and infrequent. Almost as elusive as the red wood lily or the hermit thrush, which she honored in print and on canvas, she always retreated to her nurturing mountains after a sojourn into the oustide world. For about 15 years she offered intermittently the fruits of her writing, painting and interpreting of folk culture; and then she was gone, as quietly and unostentatiously as she had come. She was Emma Bell Miles.

From 1904, the date of her first publication, to 1919, the date of her death at age 39, Miles produced three books of prose, 14 published short stories, 100 poems, 100 newspaper columns, half a dozen magazine articles, five volumes of personal journals, dozens of personal letters and scores of paintings, drawings, illustrations and murals. Yet for half a century her works lay virtually untouched. In 1975 the reissue of *The Spirit of the Mountains*, a semi-fictional study of the folk culture of Walden's Ridge, generated new interest in Miles, but no one has yet collected her works or published the journals, letters and poems in manuscript.

Not mountain-born but mountain-bred from an early age, Miles exhibits the agonizing pull of two conflicting cultures: that of the Southern highlands in which she grew up and chose to live as an adult, and that of the sophisticated other world of art and writing. Her family heritage, education and talents beckoned her into the other world, but she married a mountain man, lived in a mountain community and bore five mountain babies. From time to time she left Walden's Ridge to go down into the city to market her writing and painting. There she formed a large circle of friends whose lives were completely different from hers in both material assets and cultural experiences. From a life-long bicultural exposure, then, she evolved a dual perspective in her study of mountain people and their ways. Early in her career she cultivated the image of herself as a mountain woman, remarking in 1907: "It is often hard for me to notice points of difference between our way of life and civilization, I am so used to the backwoods." Later she was to amend that stance, but the insider-outsider vision never faded from her writing.

One of her earliest forays out of the mountains came in her twentieth year when she journeyed to St. Louis to attend the School of Design there. For two winters she studied diligently and achieved such success in her art work that her benefactors began to talk of sending her to Europe for additional training. But the young Emma Bell could only think of returning to her mountain homeland. In one of her earliest known poems, appropriately entitled "Homesick," she wrote:

I am longing for the silence and the shadow,
I am dying for the starlight and the dawn;
For the nightwind crying free on the hills where I would be
For the forest and the waters and the sun.

Then, wild Heart of God, oh, receive me.
Take me back and let me lair amid the fern;
Take me back and let me rest on the Forest-Mother's breast
Where my lonely, longing heart must ever turn.

Following her impulses, and the guidance of her literary mentor, Henry David Thoreau, she went home to Walden's Ridge, where she wed Frank Miles just months after her return. Though she settled quickly into marriage and motherhood on the Ridge, she never ceased her creative output in either writing or painting. She learned early that her own surroundings furnished her rich subject matter. A delightful rhythmic verse from 1907 called "The Banjo and the Loom" is set on the porch of a mountain cabin and languaged with the dialect of the culture. The conjoining of the banjo and the loom intrigues Miles as an image which represents mountaineers at work and at play, usually in harmony with one another. But sometimes conflict erupts between the female worker at the loom and the male player at the banjo. The author begins with an onomatopoeic description of the mingled sounds coming from the two instruments:

Emma Bell Miles, age 35, from the collection of Judith Miles Ford

Thump-chug-a-tinkle-tang, tump-a-tinkle-tine!
Listen at the banjo and the loom;
Banjo keeps a-pickin' in the shadow o' the vine,
Batten keeps a-thuddin' th'ough the room.

Then she personifies the loom and the banjo to allow them to argue a point that a reticent wife might never dare to raise before her banjo-picking husband:

Says the loom to the banjo: "Thump-a-chunk-a-choo!
You lazy, good-for-nothin' scamp!
My head's a-swimmin' with the work I've got to do,
My back's a-th'obbin' with a cramp.
Goin' up a Cripple Creek, layin' in the shade.
Waitin'for the money that the old man made
Nary hill o' taters hoed and your ax has laid
More'n a week a-rustin' in the damp!"

Banjo keeps a-twangin' clear: "Time, oh, Keep-a-time!
What's the good o' harkin' from the tomb?
I can set you dancin' to a ringin' rip o' rhyme;
I can always chase away the gloom.
'Way down yonder, where they plant a heap o' truck,
Sleepin' in the corn-pile, covered with a shuck--
Oh, it's I am young forever, and forever I'm in luck!
Whoop!" says the banjo to the loom.

The examination of mountain man and woman's relationship, lighthearted as it is in "The Banjo and the Loom," was to occupy Miles throughout her writing career and certainly in her own personal life. She touches on it in a minor way in "The Dulcimore," the lead piece for her posthumously published collection of poetry called *Strains from a Dulcimore*. Largely though, "The Dulcimore" celebrates the mountaineer's pursuit of the beautiful above and beyond the utilitarian necessities of daily life. Beginning, "Man's a maker in the mountains. . .," the author lauds the settler's industry in raising a house and its furnishings by his own hand. From the cabin's "oaken roof-boards" to the "puncheons for its floor," from a "maple bowl and piggin" to a cradle "made of ash," the man chops and hews and carves.

Still was something left unfinished, -- she could see
it in his face,
When the firelight bathed in scarlet all the woodwork
in the place.
Something of himself lay deeper, something waited
unexpressed,
Something, when it should be uttered, proving
perfect, truest, best.

In the silence that veils mountain man and wife, she waits to see what could possibly be lacking. At last from the crown oak of the forest and the skillful knife of the maker grows a "vase-like curve."

Neck and head and bridge he gave it, and a bar
adown its length
Where three strings by three pegs tautened strained
upon its rigid strength.
Then he held it to her ear
Saying softly, "Listen here!
Hit's the roarin' of the storm-wind in the pine-trees
that you hear!"

The dulcimore speaks then for the mountain craftsman, materializing his creative urge which he explains thus to his woman:

"I can't sing a note,--not me!
Made hit only to get free
Of a sort of a tormentin', everlastin' quare idee!"

This is the "immense impulse" of philosopher Henri Bergson, a contemporary whose works were known by Miles. She defines his term through her example of the maker who "ever seeks to transcend" himself, "to extract from (himself) more than there is." Miles' depiction of the mountain man's sensitivity to, appreciation for, and creation of the aesthetic marks her as a veritist, in Hamlin Garland's term, one who knows and shows her mountain subjects to be complex, many-dimensioned figures. They, like agrarians from any region, are apt to consider first the utilitarian function of their environment, but such priorities do not obliterate their sense of the beautiful, of "romantic luxuries" in Miles' terminology.

Her "Mountain Song" recapitulates some of those luxuries in a nostalgic two-stanza plea which might easily have been addressed to the poet's husband.

Sing me another song tonight--
Tell me a story, Love
A queer old dear old dreamy tale
Of gulch and cliff and cove;
A song of wimpling waters where
The trout's white bellies gleam;
A story scrolled against dark pines
In wood-smoke blue as dream.

Sing me a song, low, elfin-sad,
That mountain folk know well;
Tell me a tale of candle-light
In cabins where they dwell.
For O my heart has ached to these
Ere love began to be,
And you, Dear, are but part of this,
The life you lent to me.

She affirms the existence of a mountain aesthetic in the tales and songs with which highlanders entertain themselves. Her slight description suggests narratives set on native soil: "gulch and cliff and cove," "wimpling waters," "dark pines," "wood-smoke."When folklore collectors such as Cecil Sharp, Arthur Kyle Davis and Richard Chase combed the Southern mountains, they found Miles' treasure of elfin-sad songs and dreamy tales, many of them inherited from other lands but adapted to fit the wilderness of the Appalachians. If the poem is autobiographical, as it seems, the poet acknowledges her own curious state as a borrower of the culture's wealth rather than an owner, but in interest paid, she belongs as surely as if she had been born to it.

Emma Bell Miles and daughters, Judith and Jean, Summer 1913, from the collection of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Bicentennial Library.

Folk custom and belief, so much a part of Miles' prose, dances through her poetry too. A whimsical dialect piece, told by a youngster piqued at his own affliction, ponders warts, their causes and cures. Toads are out, he declares, for he and his friend played with them simultaneously: "But I noticed nary one / Laid a wart on Harvey Gunn." As for cures, he's tried everything.

Chicken blood and walnut green,
Leave 'em dirty, wash 'em clean;
Milk-weed juice and mad-dog stone,
Rubbin' with a smooth old bone--
Oncst I tied a pebble each
In a rag and left in reach
At the cross-roads where they say
Who will find and count 'em true
Takes the warts right off you!

'Nother cure I tried one time--
Stole a dishrag worth a dime,
Aimed to bury it away
'Neath the doorstep on that day;
But the woman seen my track,
I got scared and brung it back;
And next week a new wart come
On the knuckle of my thumb!

Despairing of futile remedies, the speaker wishes for a "good old witch," making the narrow leap from the natural to the preternatural so common in many folk cultures. Miles' promenade of cures in poetry form is but another example of her folklore collection. She was to display it in every type of writing she did and to imply its significance in the mountain culture. For the small boy with warts, the remedies he knows have served his people for generations; they haven't always worked, but they represent an effort to relieve a bothersome malady. When they fail him, his only recourse is to reach beyond human effort for what his culture has taught him is next.

An even more obvious belief in the preternatural is evidenced in "The Dumb Supper," a poem illustrating the custom of preparing and serving bread in silence to attract a spirit who has something to communicate to the participants. Usually one of the maids expects to see or hear of her future husband at such a meal. The act is proposed and executed half-jokingly by a group of young folks who, nonetheless, carefully follow the rules.

Dumb they set, as still as death
Holdin' everybody's breath,
Round the table back to back,
Under shadows big and black.

There they set, and all the four,
Watched the windy open door,
Chilled and nervous, thrilled and dumb,
Waitin' for the ghost to come.

And come it does, thumping the chest of one, knocking out the candle, and wringing squeals and shouts from the lot. The narrator can't say what caused the ruckus, but he can announce his daughter's wedding as a result of the dumb supper. When word of the visitation reaches the community, "old Sister Peckinpaugh / Whispered out in church to Maw, 'Ain't no tellin' what they seen! / Don't you know 'twas Hallowe'en!" Miles' final lines suggest the source of folklore's lifeblood: a telling and retelling of an episode, amended, added to, and multiplied as the circumstances and performer warrant.

John R Edwards

"The Shadow," illustrated poems by Emma Bell Miles from the collection of Lorena Bates Fox.

Of grimmer substance is the last known poem of Miles' career to narrate a folk theme. She recorded the composition of "The Knife (A Tennessee Mountain Ballad)" in her journal on July 24, 1918. She engages the cruel stepmother motif and couples it with the story of five knives, the only legacy of a dead mother and beloved grandfather to their children. A dominant force in their circumscribed life, Hound's-tooth hangs on the cabin wall above Grandsir's empty chair as a constant reminder of the old man's intervention while he lived between the stepmother and the children. Goaded one night into destroying his power and proving her courage, the wicked woman snatches old Hound's-tooth from the wall and feels her way to the family burying ground.

In bitter pride and of fear afraid
She stabbed the knife in that grave new-made.

"They shall find it standing by morning light,
And know I have been here overnight."
But just as she rose and made to flee,
She was caught by something she could not see.

Then burst her guilty heart at last,
For something seized her and held her fast.

And by morning light our father found
Her body lying across the mound,

Pinned down by the point of the knife she drave
Through the hem of her skirt into Grandsir's grave.

Miles has utilized the familiar folk motif of laying a ghost by driving a stake into its grave, but with a twist. The stepmother's superstitious fears earn her a just reward and the beleaguered youngsters a coveted reprieve. True to the formula, the father is as ineffectual here as in "Hansel and Gretel," but reaps no reproaches from his

victimized children. With the rhymed couplet a variation of the conventional ballad stanza, "The Knife" exhibits the impersonality of the narrator and a steady progression of the narrated event. At regular intervals a choral stanza in Scotch dialect echoes across the ballad almost as an overlay to the narrative. The stanza is not repetitive and tells its own story, concluding with a moral for the dead stepmother.

If hosen and shoon thou hast given nane,
Every night and a',
The winnies will prick thee to the bane,
And may Christ save thy sa'.

In both theme and artistry this poem speaks well for Miles, particularly because it comes from her late period of diminished skill. Formulaic in style and content, it evokes an affective power that much of her late poetry never achieves. As in previous writings, her cultivation of cultural identity ripens into the choicest fruits.

The somberness of "The Knife," written just seven months before the poet's death from lingering tuberculosis, was not necessarily characteristic of her last days. Rather, "The Open Door," a poem of earlier genesis, speaks for her eternally recurring optimism. Taking its title from the mountain custom of living with an open door regardless of season or weather conditions, the verse announces the poet's eagerness for experience of any kind.

Ever the open door.
Not for a moment dare I close it, lest
Loss follow.

The poem specifically welcomes death, just as Miles' journal entries often did:

My door stands ever wide.
The dear dark Giver of perpetual rest
One day to me shall come,
Shall cross my threshold as a royal guest
And glorify my home.
So when you deck the house and bend with tears
To say, "Last night she died,"
Dear ones, remember how through happy years
My door stood always wide.

The wide open door provided multiple diverse views for the dual perception of Emma Bell Miles, who lived simultaneously both inside and outside the mountain culture. While this brief survey gives only a sampling of her stimuli and responses, her entire canon of writing demonstrates a continuous exemplification and interpretation of mountain life. Certainly as a painter of the Southern Appalachian region, she kept company with a host of local colorists; but for her clarity of vision into the authentic mountain character, Miles stood alone.

The Chimney Sweep Mother

Rita Quillen

My baby cannot sleep.

Featherless, red, naked,
streaked with soot,
little chimney sweeps
cry in the blackness
that is only possible after fire.

Their mother
has left them in the fireplace
the smell of my daughter's crib
drawing her,
sweet and promiseful.

I carry the quivering nest
to a tree outside
denying the panic of the mother
who will dive again and again,
swoop and cry into the pitch,
only ancient hopes to guide her search
no light to hide her fear.

Each year
she nests in my daughter's bedroom.
Each year, more cruel than nature,
I carry the nest away.
Mothers never learn:
the wild
trusts and believes in the good
keeps faith,
does not surrender.

There will be babies next year.

Ode To My Pillow

Ginger Renner

This pillow deserves a song of praise.
This is the pillow I stole from you
ten years ago,
after you stole it from a motel in
Venice, California.

We fell in love with our heads on
this pillow.
This pillow has seen arguments in
the dark, baby water breaking,
fiery love-making.

This pillow has seen nursing babies
and lost babies.
This pillow smells musky and feels
intoxicating. I love to breathe
this pillow.

This pillow has kept me company
during long nights of troubled sleep.
This pillow knows my secrets and
my dreams.
This pillow knows who I am.

This pillow deserves a song.
This is the pillow I love.
This is the pillow I have slept with
for many years.
This pillow is like my lover.

This pillow deserves a song.

Winter

Lou Crabtree

Winters got harder for Old Man. There had been many winters; how many he had no way of knowing.

He felt his beard.

One could say, he had a fine set of whiskers and one fine beard. Winters his beard froze, and he broke off long icicles with his fingers.

He thought, if spring time would ever come, he would go down to Unc's store, and sit by the fire and thaw out his beard.

He thought of things that had happened long ago. Things like White Mule dying one deep winter.

"Old Mule went as long as he could after the apple I tied to the stick, on the front of his head, to make him work."

Old Man's thoughts drifted backward. Old White Mule was starving. If he could go into the mountains, a man would give him some straw for the mule.

He thought he was more able to make the trip than the mule.

He gathered ropes and strings to fasten the straw so he could carry it roped to his body.

The boys at Unc's store laughed when they saw a man under all that straw heading back up the hollow. One boy, meaner than the others—what little sense he had was mean—set the straw on fire as Old Man passed.

He was unable to get the straw loosened and off his back. His clothes began to burn. All Old Man could do was run and jump in the creek, straw and all.

That was in the dead of winter and long ago. Old Man remembered snatches of those long ago times.

If spring would ever come, Old Man could cash his welfare check at the tiny store and eat at the eatery, built on to the store.

A sort of privileged character, he would go into the kitchen to pick out what he wanted. Always he got a bowl of gravy. As he ate, the gravy dripped all the way from his mouth over his beard to run back down on the counter. He took a piece of bread and sopped the counter.

There was always someone to laugh.

When Old Man's tooth had bealed and was giving him thunder, he fashioned a stick and set it against his tooth and told Old Wife to hit it with the sledge hammer.

Old Man felt around under his beard where the tooth had nearly killed him. The rags Old Wife heated and held to his face had eased him.

Before Old Wife died she had been out of her mind twenty-five years, but Old Man would not put her away. Out of her head, she smacked the Bible right out of his hands. He remembered when she came to him that she brought fifteen yards of rag carpeting.

"I done and done for her." Old Man had no conscience.

Near Old Wife's dying time, Old Thieving Woman stood at the gate. She was an awful old woman with skin hanging under her arms and a dewlap hanging under her chin. She traveled over the hills and hollows where there was a death, to steal what ever she could get away with.

"I heard somebody is low. I come to help out."

Old Man wondered if Old Thieving Woman was trying to come to stay. He wondered what there was for her to sack up and steal. "She will cut off my beard while I sleep if she gets the chance."

Old Man caught her pulling up his cabbages which he had buried in the garden, and with the roots sticking up.

"The old bitch stole the feathers out of my feather bed and stuffed in rags to fool me."

Old Wife lay on her pallet, her eyes hollow in her head. She looked at Old Man once like her knowing had come back. Old Man wouldn't let Old Thieving Woman near. When her end came, he crossed her hands and pulled down her eyelids.

Next morning, Old Thieving Woman was in the lean-to sacking up clothes to steal. Old Man heard her and he cut a long hickory switch.

"What for?" asked Old Thieving Woman.

"For you, Old Thieving bitch. I'm going to beat the fire out of you. Now git. Take your thieving hide back over the mountain."

He drove Old Thieving Woman away from his gate.

She had feathers out of the feather tick in two pillow cases, and took with her the clothes and belongings of Old Wife. In a heavy bag she had what was left of the fifteen yards of carpeting.

Winters without the feather tick grew colder. But that was long ago.

Old Man felt his beard that was frozen. "Is it early winter?" He did not know.

In the fall Old Man had picked a few beans and rested a while. Then he picked a few more and rested. Going down hill he rested some more. At home he sat in a chair and didn't talk to himself much. Only, "My." "My." Then "My," "My, again.

How long Old Man sat in the chair? It could have been all night or two or three nights, until it was day time, or days or weeks until winter was certain.

He thought of White Mule who had died when the winter froze hard. Now it was the midst of another winter, and he had not gathered his fire wood.

He thought he heard a knocking about in the lean-to. Old Thieving Woman was back.

It was hard to get to the door of the lean-to. He saw Old White Mule, fat and slick, like it was summertime. He saw Old Thieving Woman trying to get Old White Mule into her sack. When she was unable to do so, she screwed off White Mule's head and put the head on herself.

"My, My," Old Man said, "I'm having nightmares in the daytime."

Back in the chair, he saw Old Wife lying on the pallet. Her hair, long and fair by her side.

"I could comb her hair. She liked me to comb her hair."

Old Man thought he would tell her White Mule had come back all fat and pretty.

He saw Old Thieving Woman hanging on a peg by the door. She was trying on his beard and breaking off the icicles. He felt for his beard. If it was gone he didn't care at all. "I must not let Old Thieving Woman cut off Old Wife's hair."

He tried to move from the chair toward the pallet. "I want to tell Old Wife something. I am going to pray that I die tonight." His tongue would not move.

Down at the store someone had said, "If you have any business to fix up, you had better fix it up." He had none.

He sat on in his chair. His feet got heavy.

It was like someone blew out the light of daylight.

Where I Was Born

Anne Shelby

Leander Combs
1922-

I was born up Newfound
the coldest day that ever was
so cold the canning jars froze and broke
and spewed icy beans on the floor of the cabin.

I grew up hard
scratching the back of the world with a hoe
for a bushel of corn for a sack of meal
for a bite of bread to put in my mouth.

Times got tough and tougher
and the toughest come and run me off
and I stood in a line for forty years
wiring a gizmo onto a gadget about 500 times a day.

Now that's over with.
I've got me a television set, a La-Zee Boy recline,
one hickory chair my wife's granddad made,
a microwave oven, some other stuff, and Mother's churn.

My boy works for a big outfit,
sells computers.
Says he can get a good one cheap but
I don't want it. I've got too much in my house already.

Lizzie Webb
1900-1916

I was born on Teges.
Daddy worked in the log woods.
Mother took care of the house
and the garden and the cow
and the chickens and my brothers
and me. I helped:
scrubbed clothes, hunted eggs,
gathered kindling.
But the job I liked the best was of an evening
to go up in the woods to get the cow.
For then I could be off to myself
and walk barefooted on the leaves and moss
and feel the good old friend I felt
in the oak tree limbs and the big creek rock
and finally hear that little cowbell song
down by the wet weather spring
and smell of the cow's warm neck
and slip into her sad
brown
sad brown eyes.

About *"Where I Was Born"*

Anne Shelby

I'm not sure what it is about the mountains that makes us want to talk about the region and write about it, what it is that insists that it matter. . .But to me there is something in the language that is very alive to me, that delights and surprises me. . .In these three poems, the woman's voice is much quieter than the two men's voices, and she has less to say that bears on regional history or sociology. But to me her voice is the most haunting.

All those women and girls, silent and serious-looking in old pictures, walking to the well to draw water, carrying a child up a steep footpath, sitting under a shade tree breaking beans--what were they thinking?

Greenberry Bishop
1913-

I was born in the Red Clay Gap
and had the best mommy that ever was
and the best daddy.
And they raised a big gang of us
and had no trouble.

And I married and never left
but for one year at the cartridge factory
and one on the CCC.
And I wouldn't live in Ohio
if you was to deed it to me.

I've seed them that's been to Ohio
with their big shiny car, quiet as a hearse,
them prancing like a dog up on its hind legs
holding their mouth like a bass when they talk
"excited" over this and "excited" over that.

When I have heard them years ago
hoop holler and halloo
from one ridge to the next
and seed them down in a dry creek bed
on the back of a half-starved mule.

The Picture

Julia Nunnally Duncan

Oh, do come in. What a sweet girl to bring me my dinner. Sit down honey and rest a spell; you must be tired carrying around these meals for us old people. Lord, it is sweet of you. No, now you take some credit for this. I'm sure you could be spending this time with your young friends. I reckon you must get a little weary being around old folks all the time. Young people like to be with young people. No, honey., That's just the nature of things; they's no shame in that. Peas? Lord, yes I do. This look delicious. And mashed potaters. No, I don't mind instant. I know it'd be hard to make up a mess of real potaters for all the old people who have to be fed. Mercy, no. A person can't be choosy when food's brung to his door, now can he? Mercy, no.

Sit down here on this couch. Oh, you can for a minute, can't you? I don't get too much company out here in the country. I was so happy to hear someone would be coming out through the week to bring my dinner; gets kind of lonesome here since Josh passed away. Why I don't even have no animals here anymore. Lord, what company a animal can be; you don't know till one's gone. Course they's old lady Parker just across the creek but she's no company. Crazy as a loon since her old man John passed on couple years ago. You know, he laid dead two-three days in their root cellar (she kept her canning there--don't can no more far as I know) before Daisy knowed he wasn't just gone hunting. Why he'd stay off on a hunting trip for days, so when Daisy didn't notice him puttering around, she naturally figured he'd gone off on one of his trips.

Well, she was minding her own business one day, working on a quilt, I think it was, when Everett Morgan come by looking for John. He said he and John were supposed to go cut wood that day and John hadn't showed up down at Simpson's store at ten. Well, Daisy told Everett she believed John was hunting and Everett said, "Hell-o (excuse my language, honey, but that's the way I heard it), John ain't gone no-huntin. Now I know that fer a fact cause I got his rifle at my house, refinishin his stock."

Daisy didn't panic cause John had also been knowed to take a bottle to the cellar and stay there overnight, though she wouldn't admit that to a soul, being a baptised member of Simpson Creek Baptist Church. It's be awful cold in the cellar, but after this kind of drunk, he'd be ashamed to face her, and would stay hid till he got tired of eating raw potaters and pickled beets. She told Everett he might find John in the cellar studying his Bible by oil lamp. Everett laughed and said, "Studyin the label on his liquor bottle, more like," and embarrassed poor Daisy to death.

But Everett said he'd go check, and in a few minutes he come back white as a sheet, saying poor John was cold as a corpse and was a corpse, matter of fact. Said the cold had preserved him right much but the swelling and decay had already set in (they was talk of rats in that cellar, too. Lord, who knows?). Mercy, what a thing to be talking about while eating this nice meal. Oh, Daisy's alright, but you can't make much sense out of anything she says; that's all.

Oh, this meatloaf's good. You must have some good cooks out there at the Center. You know, good meatloaf's hard to make, don't you think? Josh always liked my meatloaf; course I put in fresh pork sausage. That's the trick. Yes, all my men were satisfied with my cooking, I reckon. Sons? Oh, Lord yes, honey, three of them. They's Henry, who works at a big General Motors plant in Michigan (a regular Yankee now, accent and all), and Aaron, who's a big-shot car salesman in Charlotte. You might a saw him on the T.V. He makes commercials and dresses up like Abraham Lincoln and calls himself "honest Aaron." Bought me that T.V. there, I think, just so I'd see him. It's right embarrassing, especially the way most people around here feel about Lincoln—never forgive him for freeing the slaves and siding against the South—but Aaron says it's what sells. I reckon he knows what he's doing and since he never shows his face around here anyway, I guess I ortn't to be too concerned. But he is my boy and people do talk.

My third? Oh, mercy yes. Andrew. Yes, my baby. See that picture on the wall over the T.V.? Yes, come over here and look close. See, he's my Andrew. Such a sweet boy. And handsome, don't you think? If I must say, he was the handsomest of my sons. Look at that dark hair, them smooth dark eyebrows. A real beauty of a boy. Such a sweet expression on them lips I remember kissing his lips that day when the picture was made.

They carried the coffin in here, set it right in the middle of the floor so people could walk by and look at him good. And people come! You'd be surprised how crowded this little front room got one night. Why, Andrew had friends. Young and old. He was quite a character and as loving a son as any mother could ask for. He was more help around here to Josh than the other boys put together; I know that. I recall Josh saying more times than one that our garden never did produce as good after Andrew was gone, and the animals even changed.

You know, I'll tell you something queer. Our old cow Tess quit giving milk after Andrew left us. Andrew loved that cow and he always was the one to go out in the mornings and late evenings and milk her. She wouldn't let anyone else touch her. I think it was Andrew's gentle touch and soft voice. He'd sing "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair" while milking her, and that must have soothed her. The day after it happened and they brung the coffin in here, one of the men from the church went out with the bucket and tried to milk Tess. Why, that cow wouldn't give a drop. She just made the most pitiful sound—bellowing like a cow in heat—and wouldn't give a ounce. We all thought she'd get used to someone new milking her, but not so a'tall. Right soon after that, we had to sell her. It was a real sad situation; tore Josh up to hear that cow moaning at night for Andrew.

Honey? Are you feeling alright? You look a little peaked. I guess all this talk had upset you. Oh, no, honey. This picture here is a comfort to me. I guess young folks ain't used to pictures of the dead. But, you see, in my time, taking pictures of the dead was common. People kind of felt that a picture taken at a person's death would capture the most peaceful time of that person's life, a time when a person was closest to his Maker—his sweet by and by, like the hymn says. Course, I know a lot of people these days don't believe in the afterlife or in God, for that matter, but people did back then. As sure as anything, they believed in a better life after death; that belief was their hope.

Lord, they was so much suffering and death in families then: tuberculosis, pneumonia, colitis, the old people and the babies, all the same; people had to have something to look forward to. They took pictures. They was a comfort. Well, now look at Andrew's face on that picture there: could you ask for a more peaceful expression?

He looks like he's just seen the light of God's glory and can rest content. No, I wouldn't part with that picture for nothing. It's about all the company I have now. When I come in here in the morning, I look up and there is Andrew, his face young, forever fourteen, and before I get in bed at night, I come in here and he's in the house with me, resting in that satiny bed, as sure as if he was laying beside me in my own. I look at that sweet expression of rest on his face, and I can sleep then too.

I dream about him; sometimes I wake up and reach for him. I say, "Andrew, my boy, are you here?" And he says, "Mama, I'm here." And I believe he is. Josh used to say he could feel Andrew beside him out in the garden. Or out in the pasture where Andrew's body is buried. The spring that Josh died, he was in his bed a lot toward the end. In the last days, he started talking out of his head, and he called out my name. He was shaking and sweating at the same time and mumbling. He said, "Emily" (he only called me Emily before we was married, Emmy afterwards, except when he intended to say something serious). He said, "Emily, I heard the boy. He said "Papa, I don't want to be dead. Take down the picture. It keeps me dead." And Josh cried, tears wetting his stiff mustache and his old leathery wrinkled cheeks, and told me to do what the boy asked. Josh went unconscious then and never spoke again. Doctor Hansen said Josh's fever burnt out his brain and he was hallucinating when he called me to his bed. So I disregarded what he requested.

I think my boy Andrew is around somewhere—outside, in this house, at my bed at night—and he would tell me if I was doing something that hurt him. Now don't it seem like he would? No, I wouldn't part with that picture, not for nothing. It's my baby, always young as the day he died.

Oh, dear. I believe I've upset you. Mercy, this talk's bothered you. You don't have to go, do you, honey? But you've only been here a few minutes; can't you stay?

I could take you out to the pasture. Tess's barn. It'd do me good to get out. No? Oh, well. You will come back tomorrow, won't you? You know I don't get much company out here in the country and things are awful lonesome. Do come back, and I'll tell you some things I forgot. Good-bye, honey. Good-bye. We'll see you tomorrow.

Oh, my. I think I upset that child. Lord, who knows?

Well, Andrew, my boy, let's see what's on the T.V. Maybe we've missed your brother Aaron.

About "The Picture"

Julia Nunnally Duncan

I was inspired to write "The Picture" after I attended a family reunion one August a while back. Hanging on the weatherboard wall of the "old homeplace" front room was a photograph of a boy, some distant cousin of mine, in his coffin. Beside this photo was a wedding portrait. The photograph of the dead boy horrified but fascinated me, and I began to ask around about this grotesque ritual. Apparently in my region of western North Carolina the custom of photographing the dead has been and still is common. My students cite examples of such photographs in their family albums and my own grandmother's threadbare Victorian album contains a faded picture of a dead infant, identity unknown. The subject still intrigues me because it seems a rich example of my mountain culture and heritage.

Louise Boyle

The Conversion of Brother Jack

Margery Plummer

Jack lived on the outskirts of White Sulphur, a town that not many people would visit on purpose. That is, unless they had friends or relatives there. The town didn't boast much "history." It had no historic homes, museums or amusement parks, no tourist attractions at all. Some citizens worked in a nearby city, a few owned businesses, some of the women worked at the shirt factory on the edge of town, but most citizens of White Sulphur worked their own farms and lived out their lives in relative peace. Most of those born in White Sulphur lived there, having never strayed far beyond the nearest city, and most of those who served in wars, survived and returned. Others not so fortunate were reincarnated in gold stars in front windows of homes of their families.

Jack, a lifelong resident, at fifty was his own man. His parents had died many years before, then his two brothers and a sister and most other relatives in rapid succession. Jack was left alone with the family home, which he had never left. He was not lazy. He wasn't dull. He just did what he chose to do. He worked for neighbor farmers, grew his own garden, picked and sold berries, roamed the woods and became an expert in plant and animal life, read and reread his National Geographics, without any desire to leave his armchair to travel, and he watched baseball on television.

Jack was liked and respected by almost everyone. Acquaintances stopped to chat sometime as Jack sat hunkered against the dingy concrete wall of the hardware store, defly rolling a cigarette with one hand. With the string of the tobacco sack, between his teeth, he'd pull tight, closing the sack. Almost in the same gesture, he would strike a match on the fasterner of his overall gallus, light the cigarette and blow a thin ribbon of blue smoke toward the pale winter sun. These were moments of contentment.

People he met on the street said, "Hi, Jack." No one said, "Mr. Jack" nor "Mr Benjamin," his real name. His last name was never used except on documents. No one ever said, "Mr. Brown." At times Jack felt a little lonely. The truth was he was shy. He hadn't learned to really reach out, to make a connection.

Usually Jack wore overalls, a plaid shirt, a baseball cap or in winter a felt hat turned down all around for warmth and to shade his eyes. He had a good navy suit for winter and a light blue one for summer, and after he wore a white dress shirt, he had it laundered. On rare occasions when he "dressed", he was immaculate, shoes shined, a spotless handkerchief in his pocket.

He had never joined a church or any other organization. By tradition, his family was Fundamentalist, and that's the church Jack attended, only during revivals. It gave him a sense of belonging, if only for a while, to a community, a group.

There were four churches in White Sulphur, but some people counted only three. The all Black Bishop's Jesus is the Answer Church was not included in the local United Churches' organization, but it was far from inactive. The group was housed in a long, "movie set" looking store-front building which has been used for various activities, from a Karate studio to a Gameland. Outside, pale pink and green neon tubing cast an eerie glow on church members leaving church on Sunday night and Wednesday evening services. Sunday mornings found a fairly large congregation of worshipers in attendance. Reverend Bishop dispensed generous doses of love, good will, brotherhood, tolerance to any and all who would accept. In White Sulphur, he had few takers outside his flock.

Late July in White Sulphur was, some years, almost unbearable. The town, held in the vise-like grip of the near end of summer seemed almost to shut down. Crops in good years were reaching maturity, but activity in the town ebbed, creeks ran low, dog days' warnings kept children away from the swimming holes, families came off porches and sat "out" in lawn chairs at night as children played hide and seek.

With the coming of August, however, though the weather was still very hot, the revivals brought a kind of diversion not available at any other time of the year. Ministers of the three "main" churches in the town worked out a schedule, whereby each church was allowed a week with a few days' extra time in case, as one minister said, "a few more wayward souls were on the brink of being saved."

Visiting ministers, or evangelistists, were brought in from other towns or many times from other states. Church wives cooked wonderful meals for these visitors and the regular ministers. Each tried to outdo the other in cooking home-grown vegetables and baking delicious desserts. The townspeople, if not in a religious frenzy, at least were frequently reminded of concerns of the soul. Hymns, "How Great Thou Art," "Washed in the Blood of the Lamb," and "Amazing Grace" floated out open church windows.

Jack got ready, too. He brushed his light blue suit, polished and shined his shoes, checked to make sure his shirts were clean. He shaved, dressed carefully, brushed his thick hair and walked to the Fundamentalist church. He spent every night that week. At the door after services he noticed the preacher speaking with members and visitors. To the visitors he said "Mr. or Mrs. or Miss", to the members it was "Brother or Sister", but to him it was just "Good evening, Jack." On the way home, he always noticed groups of church people gathering at the White Princess, but none of them ever invited him to join them. So he continued on home, took off his suit and hung it up, then fell asleep in front of the television.

Beginning on Thursday night, the "pressure", as some jokingly called it, was evident. As the invitation was sung, two of the deacons walked over to Jack and, resting their hands on his shoulders, asked, "Are you ready, Jack?" Jack stood rooted to the floor, his calloused hands gripping tightly the pew in front of him, his head bowed. "No," he whispered, his face burning. Why did it have to be so public, he wondered. Couldn't he profess privately? Couldn't people see what you were by the way you lived?

Saturday night was the same. Jack didn't attend Sunday morning service, which was shortened a bit to give members a chance to eat Sunday dinner, rest a little and have time to get to the creek where, in this dry hot August, a spot had been found deep enough and clean enough for the baptizing. At one o'clock on Sunday the walkers mostly youngsters, started for Honeysuckle Creek, laughing and joking as they approached the little dirt road leading to the place where the baptizing would take place.

The older members and the candidates for baptism and membership drove their cars. Almost like a funeral procession, they crossed the bridge, loose boards rumbling beneath their tires, drove down the narrow road, a red clay knife mutilating the still green cornfield, and parked on the edge of the creek.

Jack waited to be sure that everyone had "gathered". He crossed the bridge, walked easily in tennis shoes down a well-worn short-cut path beside the bridge and, keeping well to the edge of the creek along the bank, watched. There were ten persons to be baptized, a successful revival. They stood single file in shallow water, some old timers, a young couple recently married, a widow, a young lady upon whose morals the members had publicly speculated, all wearing old clothes with one fastidious woman depending on a shower cap to protect her freshly permed hair. Brother Osgood, in rubber hip boots and a sports shirt, could have been a trout fisherman in a mountain stream. The hot sun, flickering through leaves of the overhanging limbs, reflected off his steel rimmed glasses. He stood relaxed as each person came forward, handkerchief in hand. The minister took the folded handkerchief, laid it over the nose and mouth of each very lightly and with the gentle firmness of an excellent dancing partner, lowered each in his turn into what may have seemed a watery grave. With a minimum of spluttering and in one or two cases, coughing and shaking, each walked resurrected to the edge of the creek and up the bank to waiting raincoats and dry clothes, as "Shall We Gather at the River" rang out.

As the eighth person was being baptized, Jack, who had been carefully observing and timing himself, advanced slowly, still unseen by those on the bank. By the time the last one had been immersed, Jack was standing almost beside Brother Osgood, and voices were raised spontaneously again. This time it was "On Jordan's Stormy Banks". Jack took his handkerchief out of his back pocket of his overalls, put it over his nose and mouth, and the preacher put Jack almost to the pebbly floor of Honeysuckle Creek. Jack didn't go up among the brethren. No one stood waiting with dry clothing. He turned and walked quietly away, down the creek, but he heard Brother Osgood say, with few people listening, "Friends, Brother Jack was providentially delayed from coming to church last night to profess." He added, "but I talked with him." That was a lie, and Brother Osgood knew it. It was one of his "golden" lies that he never repented of, a necessary lie, he told himself, "to help a man and save his pride."

Meanwhile, Jack, under the bridge, listened as cars rolled by, again shaking the dusty boards, so that he had to move a little to keep from being covered with dust sifting through. When the cars were gone and the voices of the last walkers were out of ear shot, Jack walked on down the creek, his shoes giving out squishing sounds with each step. He retrieved his cap from a bush where he had left it and put it back on as he walked toward the place where the creek widened into a pool of shallow, clear water. On the far side was a large, almost beach-like expanse of flat limestone rock. Jack crossed over, sat down, removed his shoes, let the galluses of his overalls down, took off his still damp shirt. For a minute he looked into the water, noticing, as always, the little creatures there and mentally catalogued the minnows darting here and there under the water, trapping and holding the prism glow of the sunlight. Jack lay back, put his folded shirt under his head, clasped his hands behind his head and just before he dozed off, he said to himself, trying on the names, "Hello, Brother Jack," "Good Evening, Mr. Benjamin," "Mr. Jack," "Mr. Brown." He repeated, "Brother Jack, Brother Jack," then just before his eyes closed, "Brother." "I like the sound," he whispered, and then he slept.

A Testimony
--for L.H.

George Ella Lyon

My Daddy baptised me
in the Redbird River.
We waded into green water
--him in his preaching pants,
shirt sleeves rolled up high,
me in a white dress
that hung like a pillowslip.

You know my daddy
was no more holy
than that car up on blocks.
The middle of the night might find him
sneaking out of town
or a trespassed bed.
But all the same his baptising
did me good.

I liked the ache
of his voice when he prayed in the river,
how everyone sang, mournful and drenched
from the ooze of cattails and willows.
And his handkerchief over my nose
smelling of the iron in Mama's hand,
his palm cradling my neck
as he bent me back and under

Through the arc
of green-fringed blue,
a world I knew I was leaving,
into the all of water, cold,
his hands bore
down.

First printed in **Poet and Critic**, *Vol. 14, No.1*

Her Words

George Ella Lyon

You gotta strap it on
she would say to me
there comes this hardship
and you gotta get on up the creek
--there's others beside you--
so you strap it on
Oh, you give St. Jude what he'll take
hand it over like persimmons
with the frost on
it aint nothin
there's more stones in that river
than you've stepped on
or are about to
Once your hands
can get around sumac
once your feet
know the lash of a snake
you'll strap it on
that's what a good neck
and shoulders are for

In winter
at the settlement school
our wet hair would freeze
on the sleepin porch
and we'd wake up
vain younguns that we were
under blankets of real snow
Come Christmas
we'd walk sixteen miles
home to Redbird mission
only once gettin
lost in the woods
snowed over
down the wrong ridge
Nobody's askin
for what aint been done--
build against cold
and death scalds the dark--
you strap it on
there's strength in the bindin
I scrubbed on a board
I know what it's about

First printed in **Appalachian Heritage**, *Vol.8, No. 3*

The Foot-Washing

"I wouldn't take the bread and wine
if I didn't wash feet."
Old Regular Baptist

George Ella Lyon

They kneel on the slanting floor
before feet white as roots,
humble as tree stumps.
Men before men
women before women
to soothe the sourness
bound in each other's journeys.
Corns, callouses, bone knobs
all received and rinsed
given back clean
to Sunday shoes and hightops.

This is how they prepare
for the Lord's Supper,
singing and carrying a towel
and a basin of water,
praying while kids put soot
in their socks--almost as good
as nailing someone in the outhouse.

Jesus started it: He washed feet
after Magdalen dried His ankles
with her hair. "If I wash thee not,
thou hast no part with me."

All servants, they bathe
flesh warped to its balance.
God of the rootwad,
Lord of the bucket in the well.

First printed in **Appalachian Journal**, *Vol. 9, No. 4*

About the Poems

George Ella Lyon

"Her Words" is a blending of two women's voices. Both are people I knew growing up. One always said "Strap it in," and the other told the settlement school story and spoke the last lines of the poem one Christmas day. I wanted somehow to give voice to their strength, their courage and dignity.

"A Testimony" *is from a story a friend told me, and* **"The Foot-Washing"** *comes from having a great granddaddy who was a Primitive Baptist preacher and also from seeing Appalshop's* **In The Good Old Fashioned Way.**

'Lectric

Lee Howard

If you put off you'll pay all of a once
J.L. and me got our refrigerator and stove
when 'lectric first come through here
and the next year the freezer
I want you know that they ever one went out
in this last month
Well, there weren't nothing wrong with the refrigerator
but them little plastic do-jobs that hold up the shelves
just give away after 50 years
But I had to watch that stove
I'd turn it on low to keep supper warm
waiting for J.L. to get home to eat
and them burners would take a mind of their own
and turn red hot
I've set fire to everything
from biscuits to bacon grease on that burner
I was thinking of buying me a gas stove
but J.L. kept saying 'lectric
Said gas made the burners dirty
I told him any stove gets nasty
but he figured different
I got 'lectric

That man thinks you ought to have everything 'lectric
One of the grandchildren gave him an 'lectric backscratcher
for Christmas once
A big long plastic stick with a little claw
of a monkey's hand on the end of it
You turn on the switch
and that little claw hand would vibrate
I want you to know he was using it every five minutes,
finding some new place to scratch
that he could have very well reached with his own hand
He played with that scratcher until it wore out
Must have put 20 batteries in it
He's just a fool about anything 'lectric

Shoot, I never had 'lectric growing up
nor the first ten years I was married
and I never noticed me nor mine going hungry
nor sitting in the dark
J.L.'s been after me for years to get shed
of Mom's wood stove and our old oil lamps
I told him the money don't mean that much to me
and you can't always count on 'lectricity

J.L. says I'm crazy as ol' Sal Fouch
with her seeing seven pale riders on seven pale horses
and selling her tobacco at a loss
cause she's sure the end is near
Now I'm not saying the end is near
I have no idea whether it is or not
but I've seen the thirties
People had a big car, fine clothes
and taking trips to Cincinnati whenever they want
and the next day down to nothing
J.L. ain't studying on none of that though

You see, J.L. is a believer in 'lectric
He thinks the world goes round
'cause it's plugged in,
the sun and moon popping up every morning and night
out of God's toaster
and the stars no more than a stringy mess
of Christmas lights
It's not that I don't believe in 'lectric
It's just I don't all the way trust it
It's quick and it don't follow any rule
Try to outfox lightning
Try to figure your wiring
You can't do it

Let me tell you what 'lectric will do to you
Right after my refrigerator and stove went out
so did my freezer
It was late of a night and I remembered
I needed sausage for breakfast
and I went out to the milkhouse
and there was water just a standing on top of my freezer
Here it was October
and ever bit of food I had put up in this world
was going to waste for the want of some 'lectric
And why? Why did 'lectric serve me for 50 years
and just stop
I tell you why--'cause it's just like some sorry,
slicked back, sweet talking rambler
and the world is no more than an innocent girl
It'll get you right where it wants you,
warm your back every night,
bring you pleasure you never dreamed of
and keep at it regular until you come to expect it
and then it's gone one morning without so much
as a farethewell
Well I only needed to learn that lesson once
I've been canning stuff ever since

Oh I still use 'lectric
but with a caution
I plan on it letting me down
I lay aside kerosene
and keep my ax sharp against the wood
And when the wires next stop their whining
I'll make out pretty good
and J.L. will just have to realize
that life don't necessarily go down the drain
if you pull the plug

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A Twist of a Tale

Amy Garza

The forest was cool. The morning sun had yet to feel its way through the dense foliage. I seemed to be surrounded by a light mist. Shivering, I hugged my crossed arms closer as I climbed.

Faintly before me I could see the mountain trail winding its way up the steep incline. For some reason, apprehension began to steal its way through my body—causing my eyes to dart from side to side. But all I observed were the tall pine trees and laurel that pushed their boughs out into my path.

Shaking my head, I forced a small laugh from my lips as I thought of the many times I had safely climbed this same trail. What was I suddenly afraid would be here to interrupt my journey? I knew that somewhere up ahead the ground would level off and that I could pause there for a moment and rest.

My breath was coming in short jerks, joining the damp mist and spreading out like skinny ghostly fingers feeling their way upward. Already there was an ache in my side—and the higher I climbed, the faster the pain traveled—going from deep within my side and settling around my heart. My throat was raspy and dry, and I knew that I would have to rest soon.

Then, I heard it—the dim sound of rushing water in the distance. Relieved, I realized that I was almost to the half-way point in my journey to see Aunt Belle. She lived alone in a cabin at the top of this mountain.

The resting spot was just a bit farther, so even though it was painful to breathe, I pushed myself to climb the short way to level ground.

Once there, I thankfully stretched my arms above my head, and breathed deeply—letting my eyes travel around the small clearing. The soft earth was covered with brown pine needles, and there were dark green leaf-hands reaching out to welcome their visitor.

The talking waters of the swiftly-flowing creek called to me, and I advanced to one of nature's bridges—an old log that had fallen across the creek. Kneeling on the log, I could see through the clear spring water to the sandy creekbottom below. Here the water was deeper, and seemed to have its own resting place, before continuing its rush downward to discover new worlds.

A sudden movement disturbed the tranquility of the resting water. Brandishing his sword of defense, a crawdad flung himself out to meet a challenger—one of his own kind. A greenish-black suit of armor covered each of the warriors. Sand flew out into the water as each fighter advanced and then circled the other, using their tails to propel their bodies. Their two front legs were shaped into sharp claws, with which they fought gallantly.

Slowly their battle took them underneath the log on which I was kneeling. My interested eyes followed the skirmish, and my body followed my eyes—until I found myself leaning way over and looking underneath the log.

Suddenly, I came face to face with a water moccasin! For eternity, it seemed, we eyed one another.

"Ssssooo, my child . . . have you never ssseen a reptile before?"

My eyes felt as if they were going to jump out of their sockets. This snake had spoken to me! I wanted to move, but the strength had fled from my legs.

"Sssspeak, dear child. Sssspeak to me."

The crawdads were forgotten—my surroundings were forgotten. The sparkle and glitter of the water moccasin's eyes held me as if hypnotized.

Sssshow me you can talk, sssweet child. Tell me, has sssomething got your tongue?" softly hissed the snake. His mouth seemed to turn up at the edges, as if he were laughing at me. His tongue darted in and out as he waited for me to speak.

"I don't believe it," I whispered. "Snakes can't talk!"

Ssssay you don't believe I'm ssspeaking? Sssshould I move closer?" asked the dark, green-skinned snake, turning so I could see the almost perfect brown circles that banded his body.

"No! Please! Stay where you are," I cried with alarm. "I believe! I can hear your voice!"

"Ssso right you are, my dear," said the snake. "Tell me—for what reason do you cross over my log sssooo ssseldom now? My curiosity has the better of me."

"What do you . . . mean?"

"Ssssome time ago, your sssteps crossed my log more often—now sssooo ssseldom."

"My Aunt Belle is getting old, and I get so bored visiting her now. When I go to see her, I listen to the same old stories over and over again," I answered, wondering to myself why I stayed and talked to the one thing I was most afraid of—a snake.

"You no longer love her, child?" asked the snake.

"Of course, I love her! I've always loved her—she's always been there for me! And I help her, too. We were going to put together a quilt soon. It's to be mine some day when I marry, Aunt Belle says."

"Ssssuch a touching thought—but, my lovely, your days with Aunt Belle are no more. Sssshe sssoon to be no more—sssoo sssorry to sssay, child."

My heart almost stopped! Did I understand him to say that my Aunt Belle was dead?

"No! No! I don't believe it," I cried.

"Why would you be sssooo unhappy, child? Sssshe does bore you—or sssooo you sssay."

"No! I love her," I shouted as I jumped up. "I'll go see her!" I was running as I spoke, urgency pushing me up the path.

Behind me, the snake called, "Sssslow down, child, or you will ssslide and fall . . . "

Just as I heard the last hissing sound from the snake, I stumbled and began to fall. I felt as if I was falling deep, deep into darkness, and I felt myself scream.

The next thing I knew, hands were on me, shaking hard.

"Mildred, Mildred! Wake up! You've had a nightmare."

It was my mother's face I opened my eyes to see. Concern was written in the lines of her forehead.

"It's okay, Mom. I'm awake now."

I raised myself up and rubbed my eyes. The sun's morning light was streaming into the bedroom. My dream had been so real that I was still looking around for the snake.

Then suddenly, it hit me. Aunt Belle! I had to get up quickly and go see her. I felt that she must need me.

I was dressed and out of the house faster than I had ever been before. The trail up the mountain was damp with the dew still on the ground and on the leaves of the trees. When I reached the log, I stopped and almost crept to the spot of my dream encounter with the water moccasin.

There were the crawdads, still fighting. But nowhere was the snake.

Losing no more time, I continued my journey, reaching Aunt Belle's cabin almost completely out of breath. Stumbling with exhaustion, I fell into the cabin.

"Dear me, child. What's wrong with you?" Aunt Belle stood smiling at me with a large wooden spoon in her hand.

There was oatmeal steaming in the pot on the cookstove, and hot biscuits on the table. Two places were set.

My eyes went back to Aunt Belle—Aunt Belle in her green dress with brown circles going around. My eyes grew large.

"Well, child, I've been expecting you for days. I's so glad you've come to see me today. We'll have breakfast, then work on your quilt. Oh, and I have some delightful stories to tell you."

Aunt Belle turned, and began stirring the oatmeal. She was very small and her body was bent over. She had always cared for me, and had always stood up for me when I needed her. Now, she needed me. It had to be lonely up here on this mountain.

I walked over to her and put my arm around her—I was almost as tall as she was.

"Aunt Belle, I love you," I said and squeezed her close to me.

"I love you, too, my child!" Her eyes were shining as she kissed my cheek.

As I started to turn, I stopped dead in my tracks. My eyes had trveled to the floor beside the stove—to the puddle of water—the water with the sand in it.

Then shaking my head, I gazed again at Aunt Belle and said, "Aunt Belle, tell me about the time you met Uncle James. I can't remember how it goes."

"Why, child, I've told you that story a million time . . . you really like it? Those were the good old days when people really knew everyone in these parts. James was such a dashing young man in those days—and so good-looking! He came to see me in a horse 'n buggy . . ."

Aunt Belle was right—I had heard this story a million times—but I had never noticed the smile on her face and the shine in her eyes as she remembered, and talked—on and on.

I picked up a biscuit, took a bite of wisdom, and smiled.

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